The Pre-Christian Religions of the North

THE PRE-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS OF THE NORTH

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The Pre-Christian Religions of the North

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Edited by

Margaret Clunies Ross

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Abbreviations for Volume II

Texts

MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
NK	Neckel, Gustav, and Hans Kuhn, eds. 1983. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 1: *Text*. 5th edn. Heidelberg: Winter. [cited by page number, e.g. *NK* 156]
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd online edn <www.oed.com>
Saxo 2015	Friis-Jensen, Karsten, ed. 2015. *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*. Trans. Peter Fisher. 2 vols. Oxford Medieval Texts. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
SnE 1998	Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1998. *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols. University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research.
SnE 2005	Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 2005. *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2nd edn. University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

Other Abbreviations

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSDAP	*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, 'National Socialist German Workers' Party', the Nazi Party
RAF	Royal Air Force (Great Britain)
SS	*Schutzstaffel*, 'Protection squadron', elite corps of the German Nazi party
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction to Volume II

Margaret Clunies Ross

This is the second of two volumes that track the reception history of ideas that people have brought to bear on the subject of the pre-Christian religions of the North. The study begins with the earliest documentary evidence from the Middle Ages and concludes with the present day reception, which manifests itself across a large range of media, academic disciplines and individual and collective recipients. The North is understood here to refer to Scandinavia as a whole, in terms of the modern political units that comprise that geographical entity, as well as to communities in the neighbouring Sámi and Balto-Finnic areas. The subject of this enquiry has been conventionally divided into the two areas of religion and myth, terms that have been of variable importance and variously understood at different times and in different places. This is a reception history that is as much about the receivers of this transmitted complex of ideas and knowledge as it is about the ideas and 'facts' themselves. Indeed the two poles of receiver and received cannot be fully distinguished from one another, as each continually modifies the other. However, it is possible to chart stages in the on-going reception, both in terms of what has been available to be known at different times and in terms of the changing concepts and attitudes that individuals and whole communities have applied to the subject.

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney and Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. She is the editor of both volumes of the *Research and Reception* strand of the Pre-Christian Religions of the North project.

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The different stages in the reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North and the reasons for the cultural developments that have brought them about are the subjects of the two volumes subtitled *Research and Reception* in the seven-volume series *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North*. Volume 1, *From the Middle Ages to c. 1830* (2018), investigates the reception that began as soon as people found themselves able to record their views and their knowledge in forms that are still accessible to us today. Effectively, this period of reception had to wait for the advent of literacy using the Roman alphabet in Scandinavia, something that happened at various times in the area as a whole. Further, this early reception depended absolutely on the view that it was worthwhile and acceptable to record information about a set of beliefs and practices that were no longer an approved religion, as this early period of reception occurred after the conversion of much of the North to Christianity. Hence all our earliest records view the old religion through what one can call 'the Christian filter', that is, through a set of conventional medieval Christian theories that sought to explain the nature and very existence of non-Christian religions.

Although some of the earliest witnesses to the pre-Christian religions of the North are from outside Scandinavia, the majority are internal to it, and, of those, by far the largest and most important group of sources is Icelandic. Volume 1 discusses the nature of these early witnesses and the implications of the strong Icelandic emphasis among the sources for the post-medieval reception of Nordic pre-Christian religion. After the Middle Ages, in the period of Humanism in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Icelanders continued to revisit and reinterpret their own cultural heritage and then began the process of introducing it, first to other Scandinavian intellectuals, and then to a wider European audience, often through the medium of Latin translations of Old Norse texts, as there were few even among scholars up to the end of the eighteenth century who could read the medieval Icelandic manuscripts and, later, the early printed books in which the core textual sources had become available. It was not until the nineteenth century that an ability to read and understand Old Norse became at all common outside Iceland, and then, for the most part, only among scholars. Likewise, it was only in the early nineteenth century that relatively reliable editions of the primary sources for Nordic pre-Christian religions were published, mainly in Scandinavia and Germany.

Volume 1 takes the story of the reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North up to the early nineteenth century, though in some chapters it is pursued further when that seems justified by the subject itself, especially in the chapters on art history in Part 6 and comparative linguistics in Part 7. The later parts of Volume 1 (Parts 5–8) demonstrate the huge expansion in the

subject's reception both geographically in Europe and conceptually with the Romantic idea of the *Volksgeist* or national spirit. Norse mythology, rather than pre-Christian religious beliefs and cults, came to form the aesthetic stimulus for the development of a poetic national spirit that underpinned an assumed common system of Germanic cultural values. Although Romantic nationalism developed earliest and most strongly in the German-speaking world and in Scandinavia, it became the foundation for the adoption of Norse myth as a common figurative language in many other European communities, like the British Isles, that had some kind of connection to the Nordic past, and for the formation of popular images of Norse mythology in the later nineteenth century, images that persist today.

Volume II of *Research and Reception*, *From c. 1830 to the Present*, explores the increasingly diverse and multi-faceted receptions of Norse mythology in both popular and highbrow media during the nineteenth century and up to the present time, as well as the more academic developments in scholarship and research on both religion and myth that have occurred alongside them. Several of the chapters (2.1, 3.5, 3.6, 10.1) analyse the key role of Jacob Grimm (1785–1863), not only for his work in comparative linguistics but more importantly in the present context for his comparative reconstruction of a Germanic religion in his *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835). He presented this as a common mythological system based on an established corpus of largely Icelandic written sources, which could be supplemented where the evidence was poor with material taken from contemporary German folklore. Several chapters in Volume II point out that his scholarship, although extraordinary and certainly formative for the following century, was based in the same underlying mindset of German(ic) nationalism as the Herderian ideal of an organic unity of people, language, landscape, history and myth. Grimm's reference to the subject of this enquiry as Germanic *mythology*, rather than religion, as the same topic would come to be called in the twentieth century, was also formative, as it implied a view, common in the nineteenth century, that humans passed through several stages in their evolution, and that mythological or mythopoeic thought was characteristic of primitive or preliterate people. It was not until the twentieth century that sophisticated theories of how myths create meaning were developed by anthropologists, although based on linguistic models.

Volume II is divided into ten unequal sections. Parts 1 and 2, in different ways, set the scene for the various developments out of Romantic nationalism that took place in three separate geographical areas during the nineteenth century: Denmark (focused on one man, N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872)), the German-speaking lands, and the Finno-Baltic area. Parts 3 and 10 are largely

devoted to the development of key ideas from the world of scholarship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that influenced the study of Nordic myth and religion, seen as separable entities. Part 3 documents the major changes of the nineteenth century that made the study of religions into an academic discipline separate from Christian theology. These included the use of the comparative method to study world religions, including those of Scandinavia and the Finno-Baltic area, and the impetus to identify the fundamental components of religion as a ritualized social practice. It also traces the rise of folklore studies during the same period (Chapter 3.6).

Part 10 addresses some of the major academic issues of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North. It takes a critical look at some of the methodological problems that still affect research in this field (cf. Chapters 10.1 and 10.2) and assesses ways in which the subject has changed during this period (10.3 and 10.4), not only driven by new theories and methodologies but also by some improvements in the philological study of medieval texts. Chapter 10.4 also documents the great increase in our knowledge base about certain aspects of the practice of the pre-Christian religions of the North as a consequence of modern archaeological excavation and retrieval of relevant finds from the Late Iron and Viking Ages and discusses problems of interpretation that have arisen in this context.

The largest part of Volume II (Parts 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) explores the astonishing variety of artistic, poetic and performative receptions of the pre-Christian religions of the North in the period from *c.* 1830 to the present time. The artistic appropriation of Norse mythology begun by the pre-Romantics of the second half of the eighteenth century and intensified by the Romantics developed in Germany into a search for an aesthetic renewal of German literature and language based on Old Norse sources as well as on some German witnesses, particularly the Middle High German poem *Das Nibelungenlied*. In Scandinavia literary Romanticism also flourished, and in both these and cognate cultural areas the Norse gods and heroes became symbols that could be used variously in different contexts, sometimes with contradictory meanings, to express key ideas of contemporary importance. In German-speaking lands, Richard Wagner (1813–83) was probably the most influential of the many users of Norse myths, in this case through *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (first performed in 1876), his powerful version of the Scandinavian and German Nibelung legends (cf. Chapter 4.1), while in the English-speaking world J. R. R. Tolkien's imaginations of Middle Earth established a paradigm for the use of Norse motifs in fantasy literature that no modern writer in this genre has been able to avoid (see Chapter 6.2).

Several of the media that have provided an aesthetic vehicle for Norse myths in the last two centuries developed out of existing artistic forms but were essentially new. Thus Wagner's music dramas require an encompassing framework of a four-part performance context, much more expansive than opera normally requires, in order to give expression to his recreation of Germanic mythology as a national religion of art and the *Festspielhaus* at Bayreuth as a modern cult house. In literature some modern forms with Norse mythological themes have developed out of the nineteenth-century novel. Fantasy and science fiction, both of which use Norse mythological themes, had late nineteenth-century novelistic prototypes (see Chapter 6.2), as did children's literature (Chapters 6.3.1 and 6.3.2), now a recognized literary genre. The generic forms of mass culture have combined textual and artistic influences to varying degrees, and have eagerly adopted new forms and new media as these have become available. The contemporary situation contrasts in this respect with the frequent failure of artists and poets of the first half of the nineteenth century to find new forms of expression away from the dominance of classical norms (see Volume I, Part 6).

Part 9 of Volume II looks at other contexts in which Norse myth and religion have been received over the last two centuries. Chapter 9.1 charts the various ways in which Norse myths, and the gods and heroes that populate them, have come to be used as symbols for key ideas of a political and ideological kind in the receiving societies. Although this phenomenon may even be found in Old Norse skaldic poetry in praise of Norwegian rulers of the tenth century, the involvement of Norse myths in propaganda is predominantly a feature of the recent past. It was and in certain circles continues to be used most intensely in this way in the German-speaking lands, but is by no means confined to them. The most notorious uses of Norse myth during the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been to glorify and endorse war and violence. Norse gods, especially Þórr with his hammer, Mjöllnir, but also sometimes Óðinn, have been used as symbols of German nationalism, while the German cult of heroes after the First World War has been supported with reference to the eddic poem *Hávamál*'s praise (stanza 77/6) of the continuing fame of a dead man's deeds. This theme formed a central component of Nazi ideology. Since the early 1990s groups of the political far right, both in Germany and elsewhere, have used mythological symbols of Norse origin, but considered by them as Germanic, to further their idealization of violence, extreme nationalism and white supremacy.

The effective use of Norse myth for purposes of political propaganda raises the question of whether there is something in the nature of the mythology itself, its themes and narratives, that is peculiarly suitable to that purpose and, indeed, to the purposes of modern artistic expression generally. The evidence of

Volume II indicates strongly that this is the case. In her analysis of the corpus of modernist literature reviewed in Chapter 6.1.1, Katja Schulz has identified several Old Norse myths that have been found suitable to express major themes of modern literature, using what T. S. Eliot is quoted as calling 'the mythical method'. Randi Eldevik, writing in Chapter 6.2 about science fiction and high fantasy, identifies what she calls 'underlying archetypes' from Norse myth that allow those who use them to symbolize contemporary concerns, while Julia Zernack divides those concerns among propagandists and political commentators into two groups, either the use of Norse myth to symbolize aspirations to liberty or to legitimize claims for expansion, power or territory.

It is plain that the cosmological and eschatological focus of Old Norse myth, especially as expressed in the eddic poem *Völuspá*, has been the most important model for modern applications of Nordic mythic symbolism. Ever since Norse myth became widely known in the eighteenth century, the concept of Ragnarök and the supernatural figures who were instrumental in bringing about the doom of the gods have dominated the popular reception, although the concept has been variously interpreted. The cluster of deities, like Baldr and Loki, and other figures, such as norns and valkyries, associated with the concept, has also varied in emphasis, depending on whether Ragnarök has been interpreted as a harbinger of renewal in a brave new world or as the final throes of a dying world after the cataclysm of nuclear war. The deaths of the gods, too, can be viewed positively or negatively, as can the warriors' heaven, Valhalla. Whatever its precise function, the Ragnarök myth complex continues to be productive and is especially suited to expressing the instabilities and threats of a globalized world. Even the notion that the gods themselves are subject to death has made Norse myths more, not less, attractive to modern artists and writers.

Other mythic themes have appealed to particular interest groups in the modern reception of Old Norse myth. A powerful feminist critique of the masculist myth of Óðinn's theft of the poetic mead from the giantess Gunnlöð provided the Icelandic novelist Svava Jakobsdóttir in the novel *Gunnlaðar saga* (1987) with a means of overturning the version of the myth in *Hávamál* and *Snorra Edda* and providing her own feminist version of it instead. Both this myth and another account of Óðinn's acquisition of the mead of poetry through his self-sacrifice on a windy tree, probably to be identified with the World Ash, Yggdrasill, are vehicles for the expression of the poet's role in modern society, while the figure of the hamstrung smith Völundr, forced to create precious objects for a tyrannical master, symbolizes variously the talent of the artist and the skill of the artisan that would help shape modern Germany or the power of the individual to overcome limitations and endure hardship.

As several chapters in Volume II show, many of these and other mythic themes are labile, and can take on different and sometimes opposite meanings depending on their context of use.

All the artistic receptions of the pre-Christian religions of the North discussed so far have been of myths rather than of the social practices that belong directly to the sphere of religion. Chapter 9.2 and to some extent Chapter 5.1 on drama and performance discuss the phenomenon of the German use of Norse mythic texts and ideas for religious purposes in the period after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71. As Stefanie von Schnurbein argues in Chapter 9.2, this appropriation happened first as a consequence of 'a perceived spiritual lack' in German religious life in the late nineteenth century, partly as a consequence of the religious divide between Catholic and Protestant regions of the unified German lands, which, it was thought, could be made good by

> a pre-Christian Germanic faith. [...] From the last decade of the nineteenth-century *völkisch* ideology envisioned a renewal or rebirth of the German people, or *Volk*, living in unity with its territory, its culture and its racial substance. Th[is] radical political agenda [...] was acutely concerned with the search for a religion that was suitable and indigenous for this re-born German *Volk* — a search that caused fierce controversy. (Schnurbein, Chapter 9.2)

The neopagan groups that formed after *c.* 1910 used Old Norse myths of Baldr's death and return to develop dramatized initiation rituals of a nationalist tendency in order to symbolize the new and better world of their imaginings. These cultic dramas were informed by theories of fertility cults, particularly as popularized by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890). Several of these performances are discussed and illustrated in Chapter 5.1.

During the twentieth century, Germanic neopagan groups spread to other countries in Europe including Scandinavia, Britain, North America and Australia, frequently changing their membership and goals, though still remaining true to an essentially Herderian idea of an organic unity of nature and culture. The issue of the extent to which neopagans could be called racist has continually exercised cult members and others, and, from the 1970s onwards, it became one of the major issues around the version of neopaganism called Asatru, particularly with regard to the question of whether people of non-Germanic ethnic origin could have access to that faith: 'Generally speaking, the concepts of ethnicity and cultural heritage employed in Asatru hark back to National Romantic and *völkisch* traditions that seem to surface in modern Western societies on a regular basis, giving rise to the various waves of ethnification in public discourse' (Schnurbein, Chapter 9. 2).

The reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North since *c.* 1830 has been a story of a greater and greater spread of ideas about both Nordic myth and religion, conveyed to an ever-widening and ever-changing public or publics as a consequence of the use of a variety of both old and new media. Whereas the reception in the period before *c.* 1830 was largely confined to Europe, beginning in Scandinavia itself, its geographical and cultural reach has since become world-wide, at least from the twentieth century, and looks set to stay that way. This intensification and diversification has not necessarily led to greater innovation in the reception process. In fact in some respects the popular nineteenth- and twentieth-century reception has been marked ideologically by stasis and conservatism, at least in the major paradigms of interpretation offered to the general public. However, within those major paradigms nineteenth- and twentieth-century receptions have been characterized by a boldness and intensity of vision that has galvanized many of the recipients of recent versions of Norse myth and religion, whether through the music dramas of Wagner, the fantasy world of Tolkien or the black and white world of good and evil inhabited by the Mighty Thor and his opponents. These characteristics of the reception of the last two centuries owe their power both to the media and the messages, to vary Marshall McLuhan's now proverbial distinction,[1] as well as to a felt freedom to appropriate Nordic mythological themes to whatever ends their users are drawn.

Within the world of academic research many new ideas and theories, mostly from new disciplinary fields that hardly existed before the nineteenth century, like comparative linguistics and the comparative study of religions, as well as anthropology and folklore studies, have been brought to bear on what was known of the myths and religion of the North (see Part 3). Significantly, in this period archaeological research bearing on Late Iron Age and Viking Age Scandinavia has contributed more and more information about the material culture of the societies in which pre-Christian beliefs and practices were active in something like the forms we can glimpse from the Old Norse and other written records. Such junctures have proved both exciting and frustrating: exciting when textual sources appear to throw light on a material discovery (or vice versa), frustrating when one recognizes that the interpretation of a material object or setting on the ground cannot be matched by textual sources without the invocation of conjecture.

[1] First expressed as 'the medium is the message' in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).

A Short Glossary of Names and Terms

Below are lists of frequently mentioned names and terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Some of them are discussed in greater detail on pages xxviii–xxxiii of the Introduction to Volume I, and references to those sections are given below.

Frequently Mentioned Source Texts

Das Nibelungenlied ('The Song of the Nibelung'), an anonymous thirteenth-century Middle High German epic poem, which includes various narratives about the hero Siegfried (Old Norse Sigurðr)

[The] Poetic Edda: a corpus of Old Norse mythological and heroic poetry in alliterative metre first recorded in Icelandic manuscripts from the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries (see Volume I, p. xxix)

The adjective 'eddic' (also 'eddaic') may refer to the Poetic Edda specifically or, in the usage 'the Eddas', may refer to both the Poetic Edda and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (see below and Volume I, pp. xxix–xxxi)

Individual poems from the Poetic Edda frequently mentioned in this volume include *Baldrs Draumar* ('Baldr's Dreams'), *Fáfnismál* ('The Speech of Fáfnir'), *Grímnismál* ('The Speech of Grímnir'), *Hávamál* ('The Speech of the High One'), *Lokasenna* ('Loki's Quarrel'), *Skírnismál* ('The Speech of Skírnir'), *Völundarkviða* ('The Poem of Völundr'), *Völuspá* ('The Sybil's Prophecy'), *Þrymskviða* ('The Poem of Þrymr')

Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* ('The History of the Danes'): a Latin chronicle by a Danish cleric, *c.* 1200, which includes a legendary history of the kings of the Danes and incorporates many Norse mythic narratives, some at least probably based on Icelandic sources

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (also *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, *Snorra Edda*): a treatise on Old Norse mythology and skaldic poetry (*c.* 1225), written by the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) (see Volume I, p. xxxi)

Völsunga saga ('The Saga of the Völsungar'): a thirteenth-century Icelandic *fornaldarsaga* ('mythical-heroic saga'), which narrates the legendary history of the Volsungs, a family said to have been descended from the god Óðinn, that includes the hero Sigurðr. The prose saga incorporates many stanzas of poems, also known from the Poetic Edda, dealing with Sigurðr, his family and his relationships with the valkyrie Brynhildr, the heroine Guðrún and the latter's family

Þiðreks saga af Bern ('The Saga of Þiðrekr (Theodoric) of Bern (Verona)'): a thirteenth-century saga, of either Norwegian or Icelandic provenance, and probably derived from German sources, telling of a number of famous Germanic heroes, including Sigurðr and the Niflungar, as well as Velent the smith (Old Norse *Völundr*)

Names of Norse Gods, Other Supernatural Beings and their Possessions

The Gods

Æsir, Aesir: name for the Norse gods as a group, sometimes excluding and sometimes including the Vanir
Ásynjur: name for the goddesses as a group
Vanir: a group of gods that includes Freyr, Freyja and Njörðr
Baldr, Baldur, Balder: a son of Óðinn and Frigg
Bragi, Brage: a god of poetry
Freyja, Freya, Freja, Frøya: sister of Freyr, daughter of Njörðr
Freyr, Frey: brother of Freyja, son of Njörðr
Frigg: goddess, wife of Óðinn
Heimdallr, Heimdall: a god, said to be the watchman of the gods
Hœnir, Hænir: a god
Höðr, Hod: a god, blind brother and killer of Baldr
Iðunn, Idun, Iduna: a goddess, wife of Bragi and custodian of apples of immortality that keep the gods young
Loki, Loke: a being whose mother, Laufey, was a goddess and whose father, Fárbauti, was a giant; resides with the gods
Njörðr, Njord: a god, one of the Vanir, said to be the father of both Freyr and Freyja
Óðinn, Odin, Woden, Wotan: a god, represented in some sources as the leader of the gods, god of war and acquirer of the art of poetry from the giants
Þórr, Thor, Tor: the oldest son of Óðinn by Jörð ('Earth'), scourge of giants

Other Supernatural Beings

Ægir, Œgir: name of a sea-god or sea-giant
Einherjar: the group of Óðinn's chosen warriors in Valhalla
Fáfnir, Fåvne: name of a man transformed into a serpent, who guards a hoard of gold
Fenrir, Fenrisulfr, Fenrisulven, Fenris Ulf, Fenris Wolf: a giant wolf, one of the three children of Loki and a giantess, bound by the gods, but will break free at Ragnarǫk
Hrungnir: a giant who fights a duel with Þórr
Miðgarðsormr, Midgardsormen, Midgard Serpent, World Serpent: another of Loki's children by a giantess, a monstrous serpent who encircles the world and will flood the earth at Ragnarök
Mímir: a wise figure, possibly a giant, who guards a well in which knowledge and intelligence are kept
Norns: a group of three female beings who control the fates of humans
Sigurðr Fáfnisbani ('Killer of Fáfnir'), Sigurd Fåvnesbane, Sjurður: a hero, one of the Niflungar, who kills Fáfnir and obtains his gold, then encounters the valkyrie Brynhildr
Skaði: a giantess, daughter of the giant Þjazi
Útgarða-Loki, Útgarðaloki, Udgårdsloke: name of a powerful giant-like being

valkyrja (plural *valkyrjur*), valkyrie(s): literally 'choosers of the slain', a group of female figures sent by Óðinn to allot death to warriors on the field of battle, assign victory and accompany the dead warriors to Valhalla

Völundr, Velent, Wieland, Wölund: a master smith, captured by a ruler, hamstrung and forced to create precious objects for his lord; he escapes by making some sort of flying suit for himself

Þrymr, Trym: a giant who steals Þórr's hammer and wants to marry Freyja

Important Possessions of the Gods

Mjöllnir, Mjölnir, Mjolnir: name of Þórr's hammer

Sleipnir: name of Óðinn's eight-legged horse

Key Places and Events of the Mythological World

Ásgarðr, Asgard, Asgaard, Åsgard: dwelling of the Æsir, imagined as a fortified hall

Bifröst, Bifrost: rainbow bridge between earth and heaven

Jötunheimar: the lands of giants

Miðgarðr/Midgard: the dwelling-place of humans

Ragnarǫk, Ragnarök, Ragnarok, Ragnarøkkr: the end of the world; in most poetic sources the word is *ragnarǫk* ('the doom of the powers'), while in manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda* the word is always *ragnarøkr* ('the twilight of the powers'), which gives the Wagnerian *Götterdämmerung* 'twilight of the gods'

Valhǫll, Valhöll, Valhalla, Walhöll ('the hall of the slain'): the hall of Óðinn where he presides over men (the *einherjar*) who have fallen in battle

Yggdrasill: an ash tree whose branches spread over the whole world

Ethnic Terms

skáld, skald, poet

vǫlva, völva (plural *völur*): 'prophetess', 'sybil'

Part 1
The Later Grundtvig

1.1 – N. F. S. Grundtvig's Use of Norse Mythology (1815–72) and its Aftermath

Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen

Return to Norse Myths — A Change of Mood in 1815

In 1815 N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) decided to return to the subject of Norse myths after having produced historical works in poetry and prose for more than four years without much favourable critical or public esteem.[1] In July 1815 he reprinted some of his earlier occasional poems in a book named *Kvædlinger* ('Small Songs'). In new self-evaluating retrospective comments he coined the Danish compound *Asaruus* ('Æsir intoxication'),[2] using it derogatorily about his dogmatic Edda scholarship from 1807–08, propelled as it was by a mixture of competent philology and juvenile poetic enthusiasm.

The final item of *Kvædlinger* was a new poem, *Hammervisen* ('The Ballad of the Hammer'), which freely recreates the Poetic Edda's *Þrymskviða*, though without imitating its style. Originally comprising thirty-two stanzas, the eddic poem inspired Grundtvig to write exactly one hundred. Besides adding a prologue and an explanatory ending, he more than doubled its length in his rendition of the myth itself. In the first stanza Grundtvig promised to resume

[1] For an account of Grundtvig's earlier life, thought and writings, see Lundgreen-Nielsen's chapter (8.1) in Volume I of this study.

[2] The word appeared for the first time in a Grundtvig manuscript from late summer of 1814 (Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Grundtvig Archive, MS fascicle 179, p. 4r), which was never printed. He repeated it in a private letter of 19 April 1815 and finally printed it in *Kvædlinger* (1815: 128, 138). In a similar vein but in a much more positive sense, Grundtvig speaks of a Saxo- and a *Beowulf*-intoxication, experienced by him in 1815 (yet not admitted by him in print until respectively 1818 and 1817).

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his mythical chatter (*Mythesnak*) — after a long silence — for Danish and Norwegian boys who are not too clever.[3] In Danish the element *-snak* of the compound *Mythesnak* means an informal phrasing as well as something bordering on nonsense or fixed ideas. Generally regretting his former understanding of Norse myths as too 'German' (i.e., pedantically serious), Grundtvig saw his version as *Et lystigt Eventyr* ('a merry fairy tale'). Instead of rereading the Icelandic text, he claims to have trusted a handwritten copy of a certain *Autographon* drawn up by some curate or other. Fifty-six footnotes, quoting boorish or jolly comments, sometimes expressed in proverbs or proverbial style, were supposedly taken from this source. The pseudo-manuscript was part of a literary game, inspired by Ludvig Holberg's pseudonyms in the mock-epic *Peder Paars* (1719–20), which Grundtvig alludes to in his first editorial footnote.

The separation of Denmark and Norway in the Peace Treaty of Kiel in 1814 after a union of 417 years invalidated Grundtvig's view of Danish history and took him a long time to accept. In an extensive footnote attributed to *Autographon*, he launched a redating of *Þrymskviða* to 1397 by some nameless scholar, the year of the Danish queen Margrete's realization of the Kalmar Union of all three Scandinavian kingdoms. Grundtvig, however, would rather have seen the myth as a remarkable prophecy about the retrieval of the stolen hammer (Norway) and the killing of the guilty giants (the Swedes) by Thor (Denmark). Such a hope could not be published legitimately on Danish soil in 1815, hence the pseudo-poetic detour. Grundtvig no longer saw the eddic poem in the light of the *Edda* itself.

Proclamation of Poetical Independence (1815)

The year 1815 marks a new period in Grundtvig's writings. In December he announced in public a decision to give up the so far futile direct Christian teachings in his poetry. Instead he aimed at drawing upon a large variety of symbols and images, including those of Norse mythology: they might fit a contemporary context, even to the extent of suppressing their original messages.

Heimdall, published 28 December 1815 as Grundtvig's last collection of secular poems for the next twenty-three years, starts with a prose translation of the life of Norna-Gest (from Olaf Tryggvason's saga), an old heathen skald converting to the Christian faith. Then seven poems combine features from Norse mythology, Christianity and Danish history in an overall mood that refrains

[3] The lack of cleverness alludes to a certain Kvasir who in Snorri's *Edda* (*SnE* 1998: I, 3) is said by dwarves to have been drowned in his own overwhelming sagacity.

from longing for lost material values when what is needed is a rebirth of spirit as recorded in the second creation of the Earth in *Völuspá*. Yet Grundtvig also emphasizes that a better world requires actual heroic efforts from the Danes in real and regular fighting. In Norse myths the god Heimdall is an ambiguous character, a White God acting as a sentry or watchman, with close relations to Freyja and the Vanir. Grundtvig sees him as a sharp-sighted god ready to sound the charge to Ragnarok, thus procuring a much needed national awakening of Denmark.

Seven Years of Translations in the Study: Snorri, Saxo and Beowulf *(1815–22)*

In the second half of the decade 1810–20 Grundtvig spent most of his time translating Saxo's history *Gesta Danorum* ('Deeds of the Danes') written around 1200 in Silver Age Latin and Snorri's chronicle of Norwegian kings, *Heimskringla*, written *c*. 1225–30 in Icelandic prose. He turned these into a uniform Danish diction of his own invention, featuring a number of colloquialisms. Contemporary critics of a sample booklet from 1815 scornfully called the style *Borgestue-Sprog* ('servants' hall' Danish), a term defiantly accepted by Grundtvig. Six volumes appeared between 1818 and 1823, a total of 2317 pages.

Additionally Grundtvig produced a Danish translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* in end-rhymed metres with a critical apparatus of fifty-eight pages, also in Danish. This book appeared separately in 1820 as the first version of the text in any modern European language. The one and only preserved Old English text of the epic had been printed in 1815 in Copenhagen with a Latin translation and Latin comments, and Grundtvig had questioned it in a newspaper. His own version was financed by public subscription, by donations from private benefactors and from 1818 by yearly grants from the Danish king.[4]

Even in the middle of these self-imposed duties Grundtvig remembered Norse mythology. In 1816 he duelled with his older fellow-poet Jens Baggesen (1764–1826) in versified epistles discussing facets and factors of earthly existence as seen through poetry. Both of them borrowed Norse mythological names and roles indiscriminately. Baggesen named their encounter a Valhalla Game (i.e., a fight where killing at noon is followed in the evening by a restoration to life — and to a supper). At the end of the exchange of confusing views, only the two authors understood very much of what had been said.

[4] The royal support ran until 1842 when it was no longer needed.

In his one-man periodical *Danne-Virke*,[5] issued in four volumes between 1816 and 1819, Grundtvig looked at the history of Norse myths with Christian eyes. In a prose entry from August 1817 about Ansgar (801–65), the first official Catholic missionary to Scandinavia in 826, he depicted the end of the Viking Age as a terrible experience with sufferings, internal warfare among men and a breakdown of common morals. Thus ancient Danish heroes like king Regnar Lodbrog (Old Norse Ragnarr loðbrók) and his sons only fill modern ears with clamour and modern hearts with horror because of their strength, their indomitable daring and their blood-thirstiness (Grundtvig 1816–19: III (1817), 112).

In another contribution in the same volume, *Et Par Ord om Oldgrandskning* ('A Few Words on Antiquarianism'), Grundtvig summarizes three main principles for mythological studies: first, true scholarship aims at gaining certainty: second, the most fruitful method is to travel from certainty in the present time back to the bygone days, represented by Grundtvig as sailing upstream towards the fountain-head of the river of Time; third, Grundtvig still maintains that it is the privilege of the skald in any period to carry some kind of a light with him wherever he roams. Once motivated by a *blind* instinct and then by a *poetic* vision supported by philology, Grundtvig now prepared to enter the world of Norse myths for the third time, attracted by its *historical* quality as an introduction to the Christianization of the Danes. He felt endowed with a far steadier and more impartial eye because of his eight years of almost total silence about it (*US*: III, 518). At this time Grundtvig still cherished Norse mythology as *min Aands naturlige Speil, min poetiske Side, Brænd-Punkten hvori alle Straaler som skulde tænde hos mig maatte samle sig, Middel-Punkten altsaa for min aandelige Virksomhed, mit Skat-Kammer saavelsom mit Rust-Kammer* ('the natural mirror of my spirit, the poetical part of me, the focus in which all rays igniting me had to meet, the centre of the activities of my spirit, my treasure trove as well as my arsenal').[6] Without any announcement to the subscribers, Grundtvig closed down his *Danne-Virke* in January 1819.

[5] This was the name of the ancient Danish system of defensive walls in Schleswig-Holstein marking the one and only land frontier between Denmark and Germany.

[6] Unpublished manuscript from late November or early December 1818: MS fascicle 180, no 1, p. 4^{v}.

Intermedium, 1819–31

In June 1819 Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850) published *Nordens Guder* ('The Gods of Scandinavia'),[7] while from his voluntary and lucrative exile in Rome the famous Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844) paid a long visit to Copenhagen (3 October 1819 to 11 August 1820), greeted heartily by all and sundry. In a welcome speech Oehlenschläger appealed to him not to entirely ignore the host of Norse gods in his future works. But, as a lifelong adherent to ancient Greek and Roman myths, Thorvaldsen answered that he did not know how to dress the Æsir (Johansen 1907: 57). Faced with Nicolai Abildgaard's 1777 painting of the giant Ymir sucking the cow Audhumbla (see Volume 1, Chapter 6.2.1), he questioned the symbolic value of the first Nordic man originating from a stooping and stupid cow.[8] Professionally this period was marked by the Copenhagen professor Finn Magnussen (Finnur Magnússon 1781–1847) and his Danish translation of the Poetic Edda (1821–23) as well as his *Eddalæren* (1824–26), both monumental presentations, each in four volumes (see further Chapter 3.3 below).

At around the same time Grundtvig returned in private to Norse mythology. In a manuscript from *c.* 1821 to 1823 (MS fasc. 253) called *Mythologiens Værd* ('On the Value of Mythology'), Grundtvig suggested that even if myths are not true, they may still exemplify the victory of men over egotism, ambition and lust. Of paramount importance for the outcome is, however, the extent to which the individual deities ignore reciprocal differences and act unanimously. The fall of the Æsir through Odin's sworn brotherhood with Loki symbolized to Grundtvig the lamentable union between the spirit of History and double-tongued shrewdness, its prime aim being advancement in the secular world. Grundtvig's attitude to Loki was changing too. He represents Reason and is therefore ambiguous just like language and like human thinking, forever wavering between Æsir (tainted good) and giants (downright evil). Principally Loki mocks and sneers at everything except himself. Freyja owns a falcon-guise only lent to Loki when he acts in the interest of the Æsir (e.g., regaining Idunna's apples of permanent youth or Thor's protective hammer). However Loki's sub-

[7] For a discussion of Oehlenschläger's use of Norse mythology, see Chapter 5.2 in Volume 1 of this study.

[8] Cf. G. L. Baden in *Nyeste Skilderie af Kjøbenhavn*, 26 December 1820, col. 1649. Grundtvig in *Nordens Mythologi* (1832), also considered the cow unpoetic and un-Norse (*US*: V, 536). In 1808 he quoted a poem by Oehlenschläger from 1807 for its existence (*US*: I, 272).

mission to such deep emotions is rare and inconstant. In spite of intellectual skill, he is tempted time after time to stage entertaining tricks.

In *Nordens Aand* ('The Spirit of the North') (MS fasc. 254) from March to October 1823, Grundtvig compares the invisible and intangible phenomenon of spirit to a belief in something, both resulting in great consequences. Additionally he stresses that Norse myths in poetic delivery present original and unique themes and forms unknown to ancient Greek, Roman or Hebrew cultures. *Om Nordens Oldsagn* ('On the Ancient Heroic Legends of the North') (MS fasc. 256, quoted from p. 5[r]), written between June 1823 and February 1824, praises a book on the topic from 1823 by Peter Erasmus Müller (1776–1834), theological professor and reputed antiquarian. Grundtvig welcomes Müller's resumption of the efforts of Stephanus Stephanius (1599–1650) to downgrade Icelandic source material. In fact, Saxo conceived of the myths as history and recorded them in Latin before they could be found in any written Icelandic versions. So the critical handling of Saxo's legends by the eighteenth-century historians Thormod Torfæus and Gerhard Schøning may now openly be called *en uforsvarlig Mishandling* ('an inexcusable maltreatment'). Grundtvig repeats these arguments in *Om Oldsagnene hos Saxo* ('On the Ancient Heroic Legends of Saxo') (MS fasc. 267, no. 2), levelled at the lukewarm defence of Saxo by the Danish historian P. F. Suhm (1728–98). To Grundtvig Saxo's legends were of inestimable worth as genuine and solid monuments of the Spirit, Heart and Deeds of Danes.

In 1824, under the title of *Fortale* ('Preface') (MS fasc. 251, quoted from pp. 5[r] and 7[r]), Grundtvig outlined research into Norse mythology over the previous two hundred years from Brynjulf Sveinsson and Stephanius in the 1640s right up to P. F. Suhm (1771), B. C. Sandvig (1779–85) and Volume I of the Arnamagnaean *Edda* (*Edda* 1787–1828). Later German scholars such as August Ludwig Schlözer (1735–1809) and Johann Christoph Adelung (1732–1806) are noticed as considering Norse mythology to be barbaric idolatry without being blamed for it or contradicted in Germany. Grundtvig even calls Suhm's *Odin den kiedsommelige Bog* ('that boring book') of little help to readers of the Poetic Edda translation by Sandvig. The poet Oehlenschläger only played with the myths or decorated them with a sensualism borrowed from the eighteenth century, something that had provoked Grundtvig to write his handbook from 1808 (on this, see Volume I, Chapter 8.1). Because it found many readers and was long since out of print, Grundtvig now intended to prepare a new description of Norse mythology as a poetical masterpiece and an indispensable aid to understanding the history of the North both in the old days and at the present — in short, seeing in the myths *et nordisk Stjerne-Billede*

('a Nordic configuration of stars') important to all humankind. Yet no traces of this revised version by Grundtvig exist. All such incomplete attempts seem to have given way to his acceptance of regular incumbencies in the Danish State Church between 1821 and 1826.

Norse Mythology (1832)

In the years 1825–31 Grundtvig predominantly wrote theological prose and Protestant hymns. Royally supported summer study tours to England in 1829, 1830 and 1831, mainly dedicated to the absorption of Anglo-Saxon literature, rekindled Grundtvig's interest in Norse myths. This coincided in 1832 with a decisive change in his attitude to Christianity, expressed in the motto *Menneske først og Christen saa* ('First a Regular Human Being — then a Christian'), meaning that human and social qualities must be developed before true Christianity can be practised.[9] From the 1830s onwards this conviction made him engage himself much more broadly in contemporary everyday life in Denmark and also continued his former thoughts of selecting and promoting particular Danish qualities through the updating and reorganization of national traditions.

Thus Grundtvig's *Nordens Mythologi* ('Norse Mythology') (1832) is the result of an open professional as well as a private growth. In spite of the bibliographical information of the title page, his new handbook is not 'the 2nd revised edition' of the 1808 volume but an entirely different and much larger presentation. Written between October 1831 and August 1832, it appeared on 22 December 1832. An alternative subtitle runs *Sindbilled-Sprog historisk-poetisk udviklet og oplyst* ('Symbolic Language Historico-poetically Explained and Elucidated'). The compound adverb stresses history and beauty, a combination Grundtvig considered only possible in Christianity, though the grand spirit of non-Christian ancestors fostered in the cradle of heroism on dark-rolling oceans deserves admiration as its preparatory stage. In world history it corresponds to Abraham's pastoral life under the oaks of Mamre and to ideal urban culture in ancient Greece (cf. *US*: v, 449–50).

Two imposing programmatic introductions follow: first, a rhymed epistle of 258 lines addressed to *Nordiske Paarørende* ('Nordic relatives'),[10] then a

[9] Cf. a brief poem perhaps written in 1837 but only published posthumously in 1881: Grundtvig 1944–64: III (1948), 296.

[10] A minutely annotated edition of this poem has been published by Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen (2008).

196-page-long prose essay, elaborately discussing human life and terms in the past, present and future with particular regard to the Nordic countries. The quantity of material collected for the essay, though finally not included in it, is quite impressive.[11] Both of these texts later become early manifestos for Folk High Schools (instituted after 1844) and for a loosely defined political and cultural Grundtvigian movement with differing wings, in the Danish Parliament, in Danish political life and church affairs and in circles of personal *Venner* ('friends') gathering around Grundtvig. His superior view at the time implied that freedom in spiritual matters is neither destructive nor predatory because real life rightly has to be conceived of as struggle and competition.[12]

Among various other themes, Grundtvig's many-sided Introduction surprisingly bestows upon William Shakespeare (1564–1616) the title of the most recent representative of the genuine spirit of the North since the Vikings, based on the estimate of his small knowledge of Latin and less of Greek by his friend and rival Ben Jonson (*US*: v, 417–18).[13] In Shakespeare Grundtvig sees a William the Conqueror of the world of the spirit, because he alone for the last five centuries had written dramatic masterpieces comparable to those of ancient Greece, due to his appropriation of *Nordens Kæmpe-Aand* ('the Heroic Spirit of the North'). Fortunately, according to Grundtvig, Shakespeare neither accepted the classical tradition nor the imported flood of Latin words into the English language of his day. So he forms the safest omen for the final fall of the culture of ancient imperial Rome and the resurrection of the North. After his death he became a great prophet for the universal history of humankind, particularly abroad. Grundtvig is even able to include him in his warfare for the 'living', that is, spoken, word as better than written words embalmed in dead

[11] Thaning (1963) has painstakingly examined and tentatively dated the numerous sketches and fragments behind the essay in the MSS fascicles 269–77 of the Grundtvig Archive. They contain about four times as much material as was printed in 1832, showing that Grundtvig was not easily jumping to his conclusions. However, Thaning deliberately refrains from analyzing the actual Norse mythological chapters of Grundtvig's book (1963: 280) and usually cuts his quotations where Grundtvig moves beyond Christian reasoning, thus avoiding evidence taken from ancient Greek religion and philosophy and from Norse myths.

[12] Incidentally the name of Charles Darwin is never mentioned anywhere by Grundtvig.

[13] Grundtvig first learned about Shakespeare from Steffens's lectures in 1802–04, which started him reading his plays in A. W. Schlegel's brilliant German translation (1797–1801). Adequate extensive Danish translations were unavailable in the first half of the nineteenth century, as were talented tragic actors, and the ticket-buying middle class theatre-goers of Copenhagen preferred plays about contemporary family affairs in a nice living-room setting (cf. Henriques 1941).

letters.[14] A little later Grundtvig uses Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as an example of what just a small piece from Saxo's chronicle may precipitate if it falls into the right hands.

In the Introduction Grundtvig next distinguishes between learned compilations of mythology written down for a limited circle of educated readers and orally delivered myths carrying ordinary listeners away by means of their enthusiastic tenor. Summarizing his distinctions, Grundtvig on the title page — and only there! — changes the Danish term *Sindbillede* ('illustrative image', used allegorically or symbolically) into a self-invented compound *Sindbilled-Sprog*, literally meaning a language constituted by pictures of the collective mind of a people, both viewed historically and in the present. Myths Grundtvig believes to be typical of the nations or peoples preserving them and taking care of their continuous existence.

A surprise indeed is Grundtvig's revaluation of Snorri's *Edda*. Branded as a miserable and at most merely entertaining source in 1808, it is now hailed by him as the product of a true Norse writer containing an independent mythology and a valuable poetics, all phrased by Snorri in his mother tongue which was unheard of in medieval Europe outside Scandinavia. Grundtvig once called Snorri's geographical-historic preface *berygtede* ('disreputable') (*US*: 1, 346). Now, contrarily, he admits that it is one of the most brilliant and ingenious texts written about mythology. Accordingly Snorri *var dog, med al sin Troskyldighed (Naivitet), langt grundigere Mytholog end de Høilærde, der beloe hans Vankundighed* ('in all his naïveté was a much more solid mythologist than the erudite scholars laughing at his ignorance') (*US*: v, 495). Snorri stood for *den historisk-poetiske Anskuelse af Billed-Sprogets og Hedenskabets naturlige og historiske Oprindelse og Betydning, som maa gaae forud for en videnskabelig Mythologi og Æsthetik* ('the historico-poetical view of the natural and historical origin and meaning of imagery and heathendom which must precede a scholarly mythology and poetics') (*US*: v, 497). Snorri's Preface also wisely included important events from the Bible such as the Babelian confusion of tongues.

Perhaps Grundtvig changed his conception of Snorri because in 1832 he felt increasingly destined to act as a modern counterpart to him, trying to revive Norse mythology in a Christian framework as a common figurative language for Scandinavians of the nineteenth century. Yet at the same time

[14] The mature Grundtvig repeatedly conceives of written words as dead signs only, whereas audibly spoken words radiate actual power (cf. *US*: v, 406, 419, 420, 427 and 473). He also thinks that the writing down of Icelandic sagas unfortunately blocked their continuous oral delivery (483).

Grundtvig never doubted that *Völuspá* was the oldest, richest and most reliable poem about the Æsir cult — the Scandinavian parallel to the epics of Homer (*US*: v, 486), even though in 1808 he had already dismissed the idea that the sage Icelander Sæmund composed all of the poems of the Poetic Edda (*US*: v, 506–21).

The actual Norse mythological chapters in *Nordens Mythologi* (1832) do not start until the original page 197. Numerous quotations from the sources are given, many of them translated anew by Grundtvig. He still puts Odin, Balder and Freyja above Thor and Loki and adds more pages on All-Father, whom he identifies as ***Over-Guden**, ældre end alle Aser* ('*the Supreme God*, older than all the Æsir') (*US*: v, 511). The Norns are seen as a benevolent providence rather than a relentless blind fate (*US*: v, 506–21).

As a writer the Grundtvig of 1832 assumes a colloquial and humorous tone. In a short, personal preface he jovially describes the book as a celebration of his silver wedding with the topic in print (i.e., the twenty-five years from 1806 to 1831). It should be accepted as a jolly party where the host is permitted to treat words and opinions as freely as food and drink, and guests feeling uncomfortable in the middle of his spontaneous cheerfulness and outspoken manners had better steal away, since he is not in the mood to conform to sulky or meticulous persons any more (*US*: v, 388). The scholarly polite servant of 1808 has become a self-assured independent host in 1832. Along the way he presents provocative ideas about the uses of Norse myths. He thinks that the Old Icelandic language ought to be reintroduced and promoted in the Nordic countries (*US*: v, 406).[15] Instead of dating the Icelandic sources according to the age of the preserved manuscripts, he wants to examine their degree of historical genuineness, which requires a skilled estimate (*US*: v, 522).

The Æsir once stood for the strength of men, the Vanir for the charity of women, and as long as these two companies of gods kept together Grundtvig thought them safe, even in spite of Loki's ambivalent machinations (*US*: v, 554–55). The afterlife for fallen warriors in Valhalla means *Blodet, Mindet og Efter-Mælet* ('blood, memory and fair fame') (*US*: v, 592), an understanding derived from human hearts and brains and not from observations of visible elements in Nature. First came the idea and its meaning, Grundtvig argues, and then an understandable symbol was generated (*US*: v, 593).

[15] In 1871 Old Norse language was instituted as a school subject in the Danish (Latin) grammar schools (abandoned in 1935), and until 1968 Old Norse language was compulsory for students of Danish literature at the Danish universities. Later it became optional.

Quite often Grundtvig points out meanings alien to what is known from history or archaeology. He explains his technique in the following words (referring to Snorri's legend of the duel between Thor and the giant Hrungnir): *at det **for os** giør liden eller ingen Forskiel, hvad der svævede for Mythe-Smeden, naar kun hvad vi lægge i Mythen er godt at giemme, og ligger **magelig** i den* ('*to us* it matters very little or not at all what the myth-maker had in mind to envisage as long as what we put into the myth is worth remembering and sits *comfortably* in it') (*US*: v, 636).[16] The acknowledgement of this procedure was later to result in rash interpretations from Grundtvig's disciples teaching at Folk High Schools, since few of them possessed his kind of familiarity with the Icelandic language and the myths. Moreover, they were eager to dissociate themselves from supposedly barren academic scholarship, guided or misled by his contempt for grammar schools and universities as Schools for Death.

A few examples illustrate Grundtvig's new procedure. To him Thor's famous hammer Mjöllnir denotes that *det **begeistrede mundtlige Ord giør alle Helte-Gierninger** i Aandens Verden, og bruger kun Haanden, med Pen saavelsom med Spyd og Sværd, til det grove Arbeide* ('the *enthusiastic spoken word* causes *all heroic deeds* in the world of the spirit, needing hands holding a pen or spear and sword merely for rough work'). He further realizes that Mjöllnir actually embodies *det **store Ord**, der giør Beskeed, som Torden og Lyn-Ild, baade til at rense Luften, og til at knække Halsen paa Jetter og Trolde* ('the *unusually powerful word* which settles matters like thunder and lightning, both in clearing the air as well as in breaking the necks of evil giants and trolls') (*US*: v, 628–29).[17] The well of Urd under the World Ash becomes to Grundtvig the deep fountain-head of enthusiasm with its gushing stream of spoken words (*US*: v, 532). The maids of Odin serving pork and mead or beer to the warriors in Valhalla (cf. *Grímnismál*) indicate the love of Nordic women for the heroic life of men (*US*: v, 596). The mead symbolizes the heart's blood, and by pork boiled and eaten every day but nonetheless always available Grundtvig understands the carnal connection between all human generations which clearly involves female motherly functions (*US*: v, 594). Freyja sharing the slain equally with Odin demonstrates *den mageløse*

[16] This formulation may contain a vague reference to the opposite of a Procrustean bed. In 1817 Grundtvig had warned fundamentally against any hypothesis being shaped like a bed in which everything fits, regardless of whether it has to be stretched or chopped short (*US*: III, 519).

[17] Grundtvig also remembers here that the prophet Jeremiah (23. 29) called the word of the Lord a hammer breaking the rocks in pieces. In 1843, the Grundtvigian theologian Karsten Friis Wiborg (1843: 46) claimed that Thor's hammer demonstrates that truth always beats falseness.

Nordiske Kvindelighed ('the matchless Nordic womanhood') whose enthusiastic participation in heroism when giving birth to and fostering warriors and skalds is a particularly Scandinavian feature (*US*: v, 596). Grundtvig's chief interpretative principle is to seek out universal-historic depth combined with a sharp view from above that does not miss any details whatsoever. That the original myth makers may have had narrower purposes does not bother him.

The Reception of Grundtvig's 1832 Renewal of Norse Mythology

After 1808 Grundtvig had relinquished the idea of a native mythology composed by an old pagan Norse poet looking for the meaning of conflict-filled worldly life. In 1832 this figure is replaced by a blind old man similar to the Thracian-born poet Thamyris who originally tried to out-sing the muses but failed and lost his eyesight as well as his cithara. Only later in his life during a harvest festival at the Isthmian Games, Grundtvig's imagined Greek poet realized that the chain of generations makes up for the death and annihilation of individual beings, and this inspires him in clear and quiet enthusiasm to sing a song of praise to the gods (*US*: v, 438–39).[18]

Grundtvig's conception of Loki is also altered. Instead of seeing him exclusively as a criminal and devilish figure, Grundtvig reconsiders his qualities. Loki prevents the gods from relapsing into lethargy.[19] As a typical trickster he is quite entertaining, playful and wanton. Grundtvig's often proverbially quoted dictum (from the rhymed prologue epistle) about freedom for Loki as well as for Thor does not suggest the same rights for good and bad, since the real evil powers in Norse myths are the giants and their allies, deserving no fair play. Loki, however, is Odin's sworn brother mostly living with the Æsir and in some cases helping them. Intermittently he is led astray by his probing intellect, specializing in borderline situations. He is a wavering character but, though frequently a misled and misleading soul, he may improve by means of intelligence and wit. His teasing moods after all reveal a spirit which should not always be curbed. Personifying *Reason*, he is a problematic yet not a hopeless creature.[20]

[18] Grundtvig mentions Thamyris briefly three more times: in Volume 1 of his world history (1833) (*US*: vi, 260, 273), and in *Brage-Snak* (1844) (*US*: viii, 547).

[19] Oehlenschläger had already brought out this side of Loki's psyche in his play *Baldur the Good* (1807) and in his epic ballads *The Gods of the North* (1819); see Volume 1, Chapter 5.2 of this study.

[20] Snorri's *Edda* actually reports that Loki, besides being unreliable, is good-looking or

Grundtvig's freer use of the myths in 1832 is demanding both for himself and for his readers. Some of the modernized interpretations appear more or less accidental, at least requiring the reader to be familiar with the literal contents of each myth as well as with the traditional interpretation of it in order to be startled by Grundtvig's alternative or diverging comprehension. The advantage to Grundtvig as a poet and poetical speaker and writer is that, to well-informed judges, a name alone evokes the whole story behind it.

Nordens Mythologi (1832) was met with dead silence from the established Danish literary and scholarly world. The new symbolic imagery promoted on its many pages was not welcomed in broader circles either. In his otherwise popular open discussion club for common citizens, *Danske Samfund* ('The Danish Society'), that operated in Copenhagen from April 1839, Grundtvig was forced to realize that his few speeches on Norse mythology seemed most uninteresting to his loyal weekly audience, so he had to give them up, though he had at first promised to turn the whole enterprise into a beautiful field of activity for the domestic gods.

Grundtvig sent his new mythology book to his friend B. S. Ingemann (1789–1862), a reputed Romantic poet and teacher of Danish literary history at the Academy of Sorø, a modest subdivision of the University of Copenhagen. In a private exchange of letters with Grundtvig, Ingemann welcomed the free interpretations, utterly subjective and original as they were. Grundtvig answered (Svend Grundtvig 1882: 148) that *den* ***psykologiske Maade*** *at forklare sig Myterne paa vil blive den videnskabelig herskende, tvivler jeg dog ingenlunde paa, da det er den eneste, der ej* ***har hjemme i Luften****, om den end forvilder sig derop* ('the *psychological way* of understanding myths will indubitably be adapted by all scholars since it is the only one which is not *suspended in midair*, although sometimes it loses its way and ends up there').[21] Grundtvig's friend and disciple Christian Flor (1792–1875), an academic theologian who in 1844 became the principal person behind the establishment of the first Grundtvigian Folk High School at Rødding in Northern Schleswig, wrote a thorough description of the book, which was printed in the new Grundtvigian quarterly periodical *Brage and Idun* in 1839, reprinted mildly updated in

even handsome (*SnE* 1998: 1, 26), a quality not much noticed by later painters and sculptors. In the *Poetic Edda* poems he cuts a more sinister or sly figure, as may be seen in a small Loki statuette (1822) by Hermann Ernst Freund (1786–1840) (see Volume 1, Chapter 6.2.1, Figure 6.2.1.3). It was owned by his nephew G. Chr. Freund, and Grundtvig hardly ever saw it.

[21] The word *psykologi* (psychology) was recent in Danish in 1832, only introduced in print *c.* 1800 (and, e.g., italicized as odd by Oehlenchläger in 1802).

1865 as a separate booklet (Barfod 1839–42: I, 176–230).[22] Flor checked his text with Grundtvig to be sure that he had understood everything exactly as intended (Ægidius 1985: 156).

In spite of the efforts of both Grundtvig and Flor, it was difficult for a public accustomed to Greek and Roman myths to see the advantage of the introduction of Norse mythological imagery into contemporary poetry. In his public lectures on Danish history during his own lifetime, delivered in the second half of 1838, Grundtvig stated that since beating Napoleon as the very last shadow of the ancient Roman Empire, England only had to recognize its own spirit in the Norse legends, and in turn the Nordic countries only had to realize the role of their ancient spirit in present-day English society and culture. Thus Grundtvig predicted a glorious future application of Norse mythology (cf. Grundtvig 1877: 456–58).

Brage-Snak *(1844)*

Grundtvig revisited the subject of Norse mythology with twenty-five public evening lectures held at Borch's Kollegium in Copenhagen from 20 November 1843 to 31 January 1844. They were published on 16 September 1844 in a slightly modified form as a substantial book, *Brage-Snak om Græske og Nordiske Myther og Oldsagn for Damer og Herrer* ('Braga Talks on Greek and Norse Myths and Ancient Legends for Ladies and Gentlemen'). Grundtvig took his Danish title from a section of eight short chapters in Snorri's *Edda*, called in Icelandic *Bragaræður* ('Bragi's Speeches') after Bragi,[23] the Norse god of poetry and rhetoric. In the book Grundtvig preserved an oral mode of presentation filled with more or less relevant associations and anecdotes.[24] From an aca-

[22] Besides Flor's review in Danish, only an anonymous one appeared in English in *The Foreign Quarterly Review* 16 (1836): 437–44 (partly published in Danish in *Nordisk Ugeskrift* (21 May 1837), 177–81). The reviewer has not been identified but in a footnote calls himself a Hellenist. Though repelled by Grundtvig's sarcasm—e.g., regarding the Roman Empire, written words, English ladies with no sense of poetry—he generally treats him more open-mindedly than contemporary Danish critics were accustomed to.

[23] Rasmus Nyerup in his 1808 Danish translation of Snorri's *Edda* uses the neutral word *Samtale* (1808: 99), i.e. *conversation*.

[24] In a disputable study by the psychiatrist Hjalmar Helweg (1886–1960), Grundtvig is diagnosed as a manic-depressive, and *Brage-Snak* is even classified as a typically pathological piece of writing from an insane person (Helweg 1918: 62, 73). Yet Grundtvig's oral presentation of the lectures in public drew a large non-professional and heterogeneous ticket-buying

demic point of view, his humorous moods now and then get out of hand, especially when he pays continuous attention to the enthusiastic young women in the lecture room.[25] About 940 handwritten unprinted pages for the book in the Grundtvig Archive prove that he did not just improvise but carefully constructed his informal discourse (MSS fasc. 141 and 278–84).

In *Brage-Snak* Grundtvig offers select single episodes or characters from Greek and Norse myths. Some are presented as comparisons, partly centering on one character from each mythology, partly on different characters from only one of them. Others describe just one aspect of a single myth. Any closer principle of organization of the material is hard to discover.

Grundtvig's priorities are clear: the pen must serve the mouth, which in turn serves the spirit and the heart, and the fluency of speech is a divine quality granted to mankind, whereas the art of writing is only a handicraft. His Norse mythological viewpoints chiefly correspond to his 1832 book. Yet one previous interpretation is missing without any given reason: All-Father both as a name and as an idea is gone, toning down a theological and religious background considerably. Regarding Snorri, Grundtvig now finds his *Edda meget mere poetisk end de fleste 'Samlede Digte' nuomstunder* ('much more poetic than most "Collected Poems" nowadays') (*US*: VIII, 529). Accentuating the psychological aspects of pagan religions, Grundtvig sees in the myths of a people *de livligste Udtryk for deres høieste Tanker, dybeste Følelser og klareste Blik, deres Grund-Poesi eller Spaadoms-Visen, der blev sunget for deres Vugge* ('the liveliest expressions of their highest thoughts, deepest emotions and clearest views, all constituting the fundamental poetry or the song of prophecy sounded at their cradle') (*US*: VIII, 505).

The humanization of Loki is continued: he now is portrayed as a very ambiguous person, similar to the nimble squirrel Ratatosk in Snorri's *Edda*, carrying hostile messages between the eagle at the top of the World Tree and the serpent gnawing its roots. But he also is an indispensable character in Asgard, taking part in all great events of the Æsir way of life and thus representing *Sjælen i*

audience which a newspaper article later called 'extraordinarily numerous'. So at the time his mind was hardly considered dangerously out of control. The literary scholar Helge Toldberg (1913–64) in his doctoral thesis *Grundtvigs symbolverden* takes all of the *Brage-Snak* seriously from the viewpoint of poetics (1950: 27–28). There is no doubt about Grundtvig's four regular fits of mental illness (a weakness of which he was aware from his youth), but in the light of his other writings these lectures make sense and cannot be repudiated.

[25] In Grundtvig's lifetime Danish women were not allowed to graduate from a grammar (Latin) school or to study at the university.

Øieblikket eller i den nærværende Tid ('the soul of the present moment or the present time') (*US*: VIII, 661). The present moment itself Grundtvig calls a strange quicksilver idea, slipping through the fingers (*US*: VIII, 657). He ascribes Loki-like qualities to distinguished writers like Holberg, Henrich Steffens and Jens Baggesen (*US*: VIII, 632, 577 and 624). In catching and binding Loki after the death of Balder the Æsir bound their own hands, because when loose he exemplifies *fri Virksomhed* and *Frisprogsmund* ('free enterprise' and 'free speech'), and it is bad for any historical period to try to *helbrede Tidens Foranderlighed og at fængsle Øieblikket til sine forstenede Tanker, Lærebygninger og Indretninger* ('cure the inconstancy of time and to chain any present moment to petrified thoughts, doctrines and institutions') (*US*: VIII, 666, 663).

Grundtvig's public successes in 1838 and 1843–44 as a lecturer in the Latin quarter of Copenhagen occasioned pleasant notices in the press of his mythology talks of 1844. His specific knowledge about myths was now respected, his independence praised and his original way of presentation cherished. However, younger academic scholars did not take him seriously as a colleague.[26]

Græsk og Nordisk Mythologi for Ungdommen *(1847), a School Book*

Grundtvig's last independent publication about the Nordic gods was commissioned for a private secondary school in Copenhagen, founded in 1833. *Græsk og Nordisk Mythologi for Ungdommen* ('Greek and Norse Mythology for Young People') appeared on 19 December 1846, featuring a total of ninety chapters with individual captions — forty-two about Greek myths and forty-eight about Norse myths. Of thirty-two illustrations executed by a mediocre artist, David Jacobsen (1821–71), seventeen visualize Greek and fifteen Norse characters. The book is Grundtvig's least known mythological work.[27]

The usually very brief chapters about individual deities or heroes mention what they did, followed by Grundtvig's very simple comments. If his earlier handbooks offered a confusing range of possible interpretations, his school-

[26] Proofs of that are two excellent surveys of Norse mythological research in the nineteenth century: Vodskov (1881) and Steenstrup (1889: 44–56).

[27] Frederik Rønning (1914: 115) notices in passing that Grundtvig lacks qualifications to write for young people. About the practical use of his school book very little is known, cf. Ægidius (1985: 108–09, 211). Locally it was rivalled by the Danish translation of Moritz's Greek mythological *Götterlehre* (1791) by the poet Christian Winther (1796–1876), 1847 (repr. 1850, 1866 and 1872). Winther had added an *Omrids* ('Outline') of Norse mythology of exactly one hundred pages (without illustrations).

book features a series of one-track views. Seven hundred unprinted manuscript pages testify to Grundtvig's care to be brief and precise.[28] In his printed text the word 'All-Father' occurs only once without any description of his superior function.[29] In his short preface Grundtvig reports that his sources are simply the *Theogony* by Hesiod (a genealogical table of gods from the seventh century BC), *Bibliotheca* by Apollodoros (a schoolbook *c.* 140 BC), the poems of the *Poetic Edda* and Snorri's *Edda*.

Grundtvig (1847: 155) finds that the Greek gods demonstrate the *Nature* of human beings, because they are delineated individually according to their birth, marriages and other family relations. Contrarily Norse gods reflecting the *History* of humankind cannot be described precisely, because:

> *Begivenhederne*, Kampen og Storværket, er *Hoved-Sagen*, og Personlighederne, mest som Redskaber, en Bisag, hvorfor de umulig kan findes saa selvstændige, afrundede og udprægedesom de *Græske* Guder, men lever i et underligt *Fællesskab* og er immer i *Bevægelse*, hvorved de, efter Omstændighederne, baade skifte Ansigt, og udvikle Egenskaber, som man slet ikke havde ventet hos dem.
>
> (the *events*, the struggle and the feats are *the main thing*, and the acting persons a subordinate matter, mostly as tools, so that they can never be found as independent, rounded and distinct like the Greek gods, but they live in a wonderful *fellowship* and are according to circumstances always *busy* changing appearance and developing unexpected qualities.)

Even to count the number of Norse gods accurately is therefore difficult.

Grundtvig tries to stick to general *psychological* interpretations. For instance, he suggests (1847: 165) that the relation between the Æsir and the giants depicts the clash of interests between History and Science: powers, however, which only seem incompatible where either history lacks spirit or physics defines palpability as the only criterion for reality and with heartless conceit strives to prove that the historical dimension of human life is nothing but delusion and phantasmagoria. The ambiguous and fickle Loki stands for cleverness itself (1847: 222). Thus the mature Grundtvig presents the schoolboys with myths detached from the historico-epical context and risks turning them into hieroglyphs: fixed signs losing in liveliness what they have gained in meaning.

[28] MS fascicle 286 contains numerous sketches and drafts for both parts.

[29] The Norns are described as obeying All-Father's orders and therefore enjoying his protection (Grundtvig 1847: 155). A second mention on p. 273 is just a translation of Saxo's 'uniuersitatis deum' in the story of Thorkild Adelfar (liber VIII, 15,10; already rendered thus in Grundtvig's Danish version from 1819).

The schoolbook was treated sympathetically by the Danish press in anonymous or pseudonymous reviews.

Grundtvig and Norse Myths (1848–72)

During the last twenty-five years of his life (1847–72) Grundtvig obviously felt that he had covered Norse mythology as he wanted. It played only a modest role in his one-man weekly *Danskeren* ('The Dane') (four volumes, 1848–51). The war between Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein rebels aided by the German Federation in 1848–50 saw a Danish military triumph as a Schleswig-Holstein siege of the fortified town of Fredericia (in Eastern Jutland) was raised on 6 July 1849. It was to be celebrated by a public monument. Grundtvig suggested in *Danskeren* a statue of the victorious Norse war-god Thor but an anonymous modern private soldier was preferred.[30] Grundtvig then felt that a rewriting of the account of the duel between Thor and the giant Hrungnir from Snorri's *Edda* might be a suitable literary monument. In *Danskeren* of 28 September 1850 he published an introductory poem to such a small epic but discontinued his plan.

In December 1850 Grundtvig was asked for a reprint of his *Nordens Mythologi* from 1832, preferably supplemented with a useful index of names, which was finally realized in 1869–70. The younger Danish academic mythology scholars found his efforts old-fashioned and outdated, but at the Danish Folk High Schools they were still used. However Grundtvig's free interpretations were easy to parody and to ridicule, especially since new scholarly datings made his favourite sources centuries younger than he had assumed. Now and then he also tried to write fiction about the Asa gods and their possible significance to modern Danes, but most of this he either did not finish or did not publish. When reacting to the national defeat in the next Danish-German war of 1864, he tried in the following year to compose a consolatory prose pamphlet around the goddess of love Freia but stopped after 122 pages.[31]

Grundtvig's last printed words on Norse myths appeared in 1871 in his lecture collection *Kirke-Speil eller Udsigt over den christne Menigheds Levnetsløb* ('Church Mirror or Survey of the Course of the Christian Church'). Grundtvig

[30] The soldier was realized by Herman Vilhelm Bissen (1798–1868) and unveiled in 1858. It may be added that the soldier instead of being dead and interred is shown as a quietly triumphant yet unsmiling victor lifting a newly sprung beech branch over his head in his right hand while the left lowers his gun.

[31] Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Grundtvig Archive, MSS fascicle 203, sketches for a preface in fascicle 137, nos 1–2.

still finds them 'matchless' — a preferred word in his vocabulary — because of the death of Balder, the peace treaty between Aesir and Wanes, the self-sacrifice of the gods in the Ragnarok battle and the permanent longing of Freyja for her missing loved one. To Grundtvig (*US*: X, 198) *dets Profeti, er Spejlet, hvori man ser dets særegne Forhold til Aand og Hjærte og dermed til Menneskelivet* ('its prophecy about the fate of the people is like a mirror reflecting its particular relationship to spirit and heart and thus to humankind itself').

Grundtvig's Norse Mythological Legacy in the Twentieth Century

Grundtvig's days as a mythological scholar are long past (Garde 1897). Of the Folk High Schools instituted in Denmark in increasing numbers since the first one in November 1844, some specialized in Grundtvig's understanding of the Norse myths. Sons of Danish farmers up until about 1900 reported their enthusiasm for his revival of a Pre-Christian national faith. A congenial admirer of Grundtvig appeared shortly before World War I in Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948), first a philologist, then professor of history of religions at the University of Copenhagen. His major work is *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden* (four volumes, 1909–12). An augmented version in English, *The Culture of the Teutons* (two volumes, 1931), was published posthumously in Danish in 1955. Departing from comparative examinations of literary, juristic and archaeological material, Grønbech tried to understand empathically the essence of the Teutonic religion (see further Chapter 10.1 below). His captivating poetic style of writing was one reason to feel reminded of the youthful Grundtvig. Otherwise in the first half of the twentieth century Norse myths in Denmark were mostly cared for by archaeologists or runologists. German political interest in the field was perverted by Nazi racism, blocking a new broad revival. Besides during the German occupation of Denmark from 1940 to 1945, Norse mythology was abused by a few Danish writers and artists sympathetic to Nazism.

In 1952 the respected Danish novelist Martin A. Hansen (1909–55) published an ambitious semi-documentary book called *Orm og tyr* ('Serpent and Bull')[32] about the Danish transition from paganism to Christianity. Hansen combined reports from his own actual visits to contemporary archaeological landmarks in the Danish countryside with a discussion of select literary remnants of Viking culture. By way of introduction Hansen hailed Grundtvig for his comprehensive understanding and use of Norse myths. However, Hansen

[32] This book is not available in an English translation.

ends by comparing the unknown poet of *Völuspá* and Odin himself to the generation of restricted and disillusioned Danish poets immediately after World War II, when Nazi atrocities became known and brought twentieth-century Humanism into question. Hansen welcomed the supersession of Æsir believers by medieval Christians representing enlightened order and law. While to Grundtvig the Vanir deities symbolized warmth, tenderness and love, Hansen saw them as a sinister and obscure group of decadent gods, breaking down formerly acknowledged social values by means of base sensuality and animal instincts. It reminded him plainly of imported Freudian ideas in Danish novels and short stories from the 1930s to 1940s whose authors respected the overwhelming force of the subconscious along with its poverty regarding philosophy and poetry. Hansen was indubitably thinking of H. C. Branner (1903–66) whose psychoanalytical novel *Rytteren* ('The Riding Master', 1949) was much discussed on the Danish Parnassus.

Ebbe Kløvedal[33] Reich (1940–2005), novelist and storyteller from the 1970s and onwards, perhaps felt a bit like a modern Grundtvig awakening the Danes with shifting view points. He favoured the ideal of personal freedom and democracy in Scandinavia and England (like the French philosopher Montesquieu did two centuries earlier). In 1972 at the centenary of Grundtvig's death Reich published a surprisingly best-selling free recreation of his life, *Frederik*, subtitled *En folkebog* ('A Chapbook'). In 1977 he followed this up with a historical novel named *Fæ og frænde* ('Cattle and Kinsman'). It has neither a clear-cut chronology nor a fixed gallery of persons but is told in individual stories of unequal length. Most of it plays in Rome and Italy visited by Norsemen in early European medieval migrations (the Goths). It is an odd combination of the action of Johannes V. Jensen's novel *Cimbrernes Tog* ('The Cimbrians', 1922) and the narrative technique of the short stories by Isak Dinesen/Karen Blixen from the 1930s to 1950s.

In 1982, Villy Sørensen (1929–2001), a prominent Danish academic philosopher and prose writer, published an updated brief version of Norse mythology named *Ragnarok, en gudefortælling* (on this work, see also Chapters 6.1.1 and 6.3.2 below). Turning the understanding of Snorri and Grundtvig upside down, Sørensen omits all pre-Christian legends about the creation of the world, feeling more comfortable with the victimized, doomed and therefore depressed Balder, the soft compromising Vanir deities and the crafty Loki than with the hot-tempered and brutal male war gods Odin, Tyr and Thor who are

[33] This adopted middle name is the Danish translation of the place name Rivendell in J. R. R. Tolkien's high fantasy fiction.

either senile politicians or stupid militarists. The giants living on the outskirts of the world Sørensen sees as big and strong but also peaceful and good-natured creatures who are wrongly disrespected and exploited by the heavily armed war gods. While the degenerate Æsir gods are barren, the giants stand for rude nature and raw materials, lead a wholesome life and are fertile. According to Sørensen all gods are killed in the Ragnarok battle and do not rise to a new life. Neither is there any creation of a better Earth. On the front cover of the book an atomic mushroom cloud forms the background for the final single fights between gods and monsters. All are losers, and everything adds up to nothing, just vanishing sparks wrapped in smoke.

Sørensen was taken aback at being attacked by Folk High School people for having maltreated and nullified Grundtvig's comprehension of the myths.[34] Since he moreover claimed that a matter might be good or bad regardless of who promoted it, he was in fact urged to issue a clear Christian renunciation of the devil, and his Ragnarok book was called witty yet unfunny, provocative yet resigned and rebellious yet tired. A public discussion in the Danish press in 1983 counted fourteen contributions (three by Sørensen), but the two parties talked past one another. The real hero of Sørensen's book was Loki, the flexible, patient and diplomatic mediator aiming at the survival of everybody — a more optimistic picture of human reason than ever imagined by Grundtvig.

Goodbye to Grundtvig's Visions

In a new preface to the second edition (1861) of his 1809–11 work *Scenes from the Heroic Life of the North*, Grundtvig admitted that the endeavours of Oehlenschläger and himself in the first decade of the century to recreate Norse mythology were neither continued by themselves nor supported by others (*US*: 1, 746). Except for his lyrical *Bjarkamál* recreation from 1817, *Solen er oppe* ('The Sun Is Up'),[35] which is used at Folk High Schools to introduce teams

[34] Sørensen came to represent a Danish pacifist political resistance against Ronald Reagan as President of the United States. It is odd that naive foreign readers now praise Sørensen's book on the internet as the easiest and best introduction to Norse mythology (viz. in English) when it actually denies very skillfully many of the values treasured by the pre-Christian Scandinavians in authentic sources that are still acknowledged by scholars. Sørensen (1983: 230) incidentally through his subtitle in Danish indicated that his tale merely was 'en gudefortælling' ('a story about the gods'), thus fiction, and not an attempt to record scholarly truths. Yet the English translation from 1989 does not feature such a modifying subtitle.

[35] The text was written by Grundtvig as an indirect greeting to the Martin Luther anniver-

of gymnasts on account of its rousing marching tune, not one of Grundtvig's numerous popular ballads and national songs features Norse mythology. It never became a commonly accepted national imagery. Instead, the concepts of *originality* and *individualism* gained ground in poetry (and poetics), music and fine arts as well as in other fields of human life precisely during those decades of the nineteenth century that Grundtvig lived to witness. He was successful in many things, but his Norse mythology project was a magnificent experiment that failed.

sary of 1817, but the original title of the manuscript with the reformer's name mentioned was not printed in Grundtvig's periodical *Danne-Virke*, because he had written another more direct poetical praise to Luther a bit later.

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Part 2

The Influence of Cultural Milieu on the European Reception

2.1 – Germany 1650–1860

Christina Lee

The reception of Norse myths in Germany is closely connected to the struggle to find a common German voice — one that could be heard and understood in all areas of the fragmented German-speaking regions. In the history of the post-medieval reception of Norse myths in Germany, myths were first viewed as expressions of ancient ideas of paganism and superstition, and then as an expressions of anti-'Roman', and by default anti-Catholic, sentiments, and finally, as a manifestation of national difference. These developments are not necessarily linear but often occur side-by-side. This chapter charts the history of Old Norse myths from a marginal interest in the German borderlands to its development as a popular feature of mainstream literature. Initially this reception got off to a slow start, but once the floodgates had opened in the nineteenth century it became one of the most popular sources in literature. In the course of this history interest in Norse myths and religion shifts from studies of religion and 'ancient' morality to linguistic and text-critical investigations, and from there to a popular reception, with academics, such as Karl Simrock (1802–76) producing popular versions of all kinds of medieval texts, which incorporated works from the Eddas. From Simrock onwards Norse mythology continued to be part of the popular art (see Chapter 4.1 on Wagner

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below), as well as scholarly discourse. In many cases this is not a linear development and, while this chapter separates the study of Old Norse myth into three broad strands (religious, historical and literary), it is not always possible to maintain such a neat distinction.

The Historical Background

While the reception of Old Norse myths and religion is primarily associated with Germany in the nineteenth century, it goes back to a much older tradition. As a nation Germany is young: there was no country 'Germany' to speak of before the unification of 1871; instead, the various regions, ravaged by the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) and religious dissent, had few commonalities but a shared language of sorts. However, among intellectuals and the bourgeoisie, there was a desire for a unified German nation state, which incorporated the disparate small states ruled by princes wielding absolute power into one single entity as early as the late eighteenth century. This interest had a cultural, as well as a political dimension and sparked a new fashion for all things 'Germanic'. Whereas previously classical culture and Renaissance art was imitated by the gentry and nascent *Bürgertum* ('middle class'), this was now superseded by an interest in a culture of which — at least at this time — little was known, but which was assumed to be native, rather than 'foreign'. To influential poets, such as Novalis, the Middle Ages were a Golden Age.

This was not the first time that the 'Germanic' past had been used to justify present events. The 'rediscovery' of Tacitus's *Germania* in 1425, for example, was not accidental but based on a designated search for material that showed a 'Germanic' (which meant Protestant) opposition to Rome (Catholicism). By the late eighteenth century the French and American revolutions had had a significant impact on intellectuals east of the Rhine, who, despite living in numerous different princedoms, saw themselves as members of one nation. The Napoleonic wars advanced this cultural reversal; for example, the parents of Simrock who lived in French-occupied Bonn were ardent Francophiles, something strongly rejected by their son (Moser 1979: 32). Additionally, the newly created discipline of archaeology made visible the remains of this past. The creation of a German nation state was strongly supported by liberal intellectuals, many of them medievalists. Influential works, such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* ('Speeches to the German Nation') (1808), suggested that there was indeed one nation that shared a common cultural heritage.

For the scholars of German literature there was only a tiny problem: most of the texts from early medieval Germany were not written in German, but in Latin. Evidence for an early, pre-courtly and thus free-from-'French'-influence Germanic text culture thus had to be sought elsewhere. From around 1750 the German bourgeoisie developed a fashionable interest in 'folk poetics', that is, poetry that was apparently transmitted outside educated discourse (Kellner 1994: 19). Influential works, such as James Macpherson's *Ossian*, generated a desire to find 'native' expressions of poetry and myth (Fischer 1995: 206). Thus from 1760 to 1790 over seventy editions of Old and Middle High German texts were produced in Germany (Neumann 1986: 108). This growth was significantly increased by the discovery of the C-version of the *Nibelungenlied* in 1755 by Jacob Obereit and Johann Bodmer. Again this discovery was not accidental but part of a deliberate search. Scholars had been aware of the *volkslied* version of the Siegfried-legend all along, the *Hürnen Sîfrit* ('Sifrit with the horn-like skin'). At the same time, writers who had found employment in Denmark introduced elements of Old Norse mythology in their works. The analogies between the various dragon slayers were not lost on the budding community of medievalists. Another significant reason for the discovery of Old Norse literature is that the latter part of the eighteenth century saw a number of German intellectuals taking up posts in Denmark, where they encountered Norse literature and the works of writers, such as Saxo Grammaticus and Thormod Torfaeus (1639–1719). By 1835, when Jacob Grimm published his *Deutsche Mythologie*, 'German' included more than just texts in the German languages (see further Volume 1, Chapter 7.1 and Chapter 3.5 in the present volume).

To understand this annexing of all kinds of Germanic literature it is important to remember that when writers considered the Golden Age of Germany, they either looked towards the Roman period and the struggle against Rome by the Germanic leader Arminius, who had led a successful campaign in AD 9, or to the Holy Roman Empire, founded by Otto I in 962. The template of this far-reaching and multi-ethnic entity allowed scholars to conclude that speakers of a German language shared a common heritage. It was immaterial to the proponents of this 'medieval' Germany that there were actually very few 'German' texts or evidence that the Ottos had ever considered themselves as anything other than the successors of Rome; what mattered to liberals and conservatives alike, is that the extension of 'Germany' allowed them to look for evidence of self-determination, such as legal assemblies, in other sources, including Norse sagas. Thus, Jacob Grimm writes in the preface of his enlarged and revised fourth edition of the second volume of the *Deutsche Mythologie* (1876: viii): *Weil ich lernte daß seine sprache, sein recht und sein altertum viel zu*

niedrig gestellt waren, wollte ich das vaterland erheben ('Because I learned that its language, its laws and its antiquity were placed in too little regard, I wanted to elevate the fatherland').[1] In Germany from the beginning the study of Old Norse myth and religion was political.

Nordic Catechisms

Even before the eighteenth century, there was some knowledge and understanding of Old Norse material in those regions that had borders with Denmark, notably Schleswig-Holstein. Arguably the first author to offer a detailed study of Old Norse religion in German is Trogillus Arnkiel (1639–1712). Arnkiel was born in Apenrade (Danish Åbenrå), which was part of the Danish-German region of Schleswig-Holstein in which allegiances to either Germany or Denmark changed several times over the next two hundred years. Like many later authors using Norse literature he was familiar with both languages, as well as with the local vernacular. Arnkiel, who was educated in Lübeck, Dorpat and Kiel, became a pastor in Apenrade/Åbenrå, which in 1684 became part of Denmark. Arnkiel's other works include a Hymnbook for Holstein (1696), but in this context he is more notable for two works which explicitly consider the pagan religion of the North, which he called 'Cimbric' after the Germanic tribe of the Cimbri who fought the Roman republic between 113 and 101 BC (the name is based on descriptions from the Greek cartographer Ptolomy who placed the tribe in the region of the Limfjord on the Jutland peninsula). Arnkiel himself did not follow Ptolomy but rather states that he is taking his ethnography from Martin Luther (1690: 21): *Wir halten es mit den Ebreern und Herrn Luthero daß Alcenas/Japehts Neffe ein Vater aller Teutschen und Cimbrischen Völker sei* ('We follow the Hebrews and Luther that Alcena's/Japeht's nephew is the Father of all Germans and the Cimbri'). The Cimbri, he says, are the people of the North, who live in the Midnight world (1690: 15). He thus is one of the first to make a claim for a common ancestry of Germanic and Scandinavian people.

Arnkiel, just like Simrock after him, was a firm adherent of Christianity (in his case Lutheran Protestantism), but was fascinated by the remains of the pagan past that were apparent to him in his vicinity, such as a range of pagan mound burials near Flensburg which he encountered on his journeys. His first work on

[1] It should be noted that the spelling of the Grimms, just like other writers of their period, did not choose to follow the now standard German capitalization.

pagan mythology with a long-winded title *Cimbrisch Gülden Heyden-Horn, bey Tundern 1639 gefunden* … (1683) was based on the discovery of the Gallehus horn in 1638. Arnkiel acknowledges Ole Worm and Saxo Grammaticus as two of his sources in his explanation of the 'Danish hieroglyphs' (runic images), but it is his detailed and lavishly illustrated study of Scandinavian and Slavic pre-Christian religion, *Cimbrische Heyden-religion* (1690), which draws on a range of sources such as the *Eddas*, Saxo and Adam of Bremen, all of which became available in print in the early modern period: Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* was printed by Christiern Pedersen in 1514, Ole Worm had published *Runer seu Danica literatura antiquissima* in 1636 and Peder Resen's *Edda Islandorum* appeared in 1665. That these works were read by Arnkiel is clear from his description of the origin of Norse paganism, based on Snorri's Prologue in the *Prose Edda* (1690: 21):

> Vor Christi Geburth soll der Götzenmeister Othin, sonsten Avodan genannt aus Asia mit einem Hauffen Volcks in diese Nordische Welt, und zwar erstlich zu unseres cimbrischen Sachsen und hernach in Dännemark und endlich in Schweden und Norwegen gezogen seyn.
>
> (Before the birth of Christ that master of idols, Othin, otherwise known as Avodan, is supposed to have come from Asia with a gaggle of other rank and file, first to the Cimbric Saxons, then Denmark and finally Norway and Sweden.)

His interpretations of the gods are occasionally on the shaky side; for example, he writes (1690: 54) that Njörðr's wife is 'Schad' (German 'harm'), which is because both gods live on the coast, and cause *Schad und Unglück* ('harm and disaster') for seafarers. The *alfar* of *Völuspá*, according to him (1690: 131), are angels, and dwarves are not people of a small stature, but a tribe of gods and spirits.

Arnkiel's interest in Norse mythology was partly roused by new discoveries of 'Northern Antiquities' on his doorstep, but also because it offered a template for his Protestant views that Catholics were no different to pagans, since the many saints were no different to pagan idols (1690: 13). Anyone who denies Providence, according to Arnkiel, is essentially a heretic, whether pre-Christian pagan or contemporary Catholic. Despite such damning words and the occasional botched etymology, Arnkiel's extensive descriptions point to a good knowledge of primary texts via the newly available versions in Resen and Worm, which he found through 'extensive research' in Lübeck and Hamburg and in the library of the Count of Gottdorf (1690: 'Preface to the Christian reader', not paginated). An example is an extensive discussion of an illustration in the Uppsala *Edda* manuscript of *Hár* ('High'), *Jafnhár* ('Equally High') and *Þriði* ('Third') (Uppsala: University library DG 11, fol. 26^{v}) which is used

for an illustration of Thor, Odin and Fricco (Freyr?) as described in Adam of Bremen's depiction of the Uppsala temple (Schmeidler 1917: 259; Arnkiel 1690: 87), and which combines a range of different sources, including Saxo and Snorri.

Arnkiel's work contains detailed descriptions of Norse gods and myths, as well as cross-references to native traditions, such as the Irminsûl, the legendary pillar of the pagan Saxons, which was cut down by Charlemagne in AD 772 according to the *Royal Frankish Annals* (Pertz and Kurze 1895: 35). Arnkiel considers the Irminsûl to be a memorial for 'Hermann'/Arminius (1690: 108–09), and thus connects historical events with Germanic legend — an idea which eventually led to the equation of Hermann with Siegfried/Sigurd (Lee 2007). While Arnkiel today is almost forgotten, he was an important source for several other writers, such as Árni Magnússon and Torfaeus; the Grimms later on had their own copy (Deneke and Teitge 1989).

Until the middle of the eighteenth century those snippets of Norse literature available to German readers remained resolutely Scandinavian. Although Protestant writers such as Luther and Hutten had equated the struggle against Rome with the struggle against Catholicism, which led to an elevation of 'Germanic' heroes, such as Arminius/Hermann (Lee 2007), few writers were interested in native heroes. The rediscovery of the *Nibelungenlied* changed all that: it offered a new champion for an audience that was ready and eager for native heroes. At which point the dots between the Middle High German poem and the Norse tradition of Sigurd were connected is unclear, but there is plenty of evidence that many German scholars began to look towards Norse literature with an assumption that they were remnants or variations of texts that had once also been part of German culture. Until the late eighteenth century Norse literature available to German readers was mostly adaptations of eddic poems or Norse poems made fashionable by other writers, such as Johann Gottlieb Herder's *Todesgötinnen* (1779: 210–12), a German version of Gray's adaptation of *Darraðarljóð* as 'The Fatal Sisters' or Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg's *Gedicht eines Skalden* (1766). There was a need for translations of Norse literature into German.

Jacob Schimmelmann (1712–78), a Lutheran pastor in Stettin, was one of the first to announce his intention to translate Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* into German in 1773. In 1774 he published a short booklet *Abhandlung abgefaßt an einen Gelehrten von der alten isländischen Edda*, which outlines his intentions and asks a number of questions about the origin and purpose of the *Edda*, but also confesses that he needs to study it in depth (1774: 15). It appears that Schimmelmann's main source had been Paul Henri Mallet's influential *Histoire*

de Dannemarc (1755),[2] but he had begun to read Arnkiel and Resen as well. In his preface (1774: 9) Schimmelmann poses the rhetorical question of whether the book named *Edda* is nothing less than a catechism and textbook (*Lehrbuch*) of the old Vandals, Teutons, Goths and Celts, among others. His lengthy title of the 1777 edition of some eddic material suggests even more people who could lay claim to the *Edda* as their textbook: Britons, Scots and Gauls — in short everybody in the northern hemisphere. His work includes translations of *Völuspá* and *Hávamál*, as well as what he calls '33 fables' which are essentially parts of Snorri's *Edda*. Schimmelmann (1777: 2) did not believe that the work was written by Snorri or Sæmundr, but that it was based on a transliteration of runic texts going back to 1500 BC, and thus much older, in fact one of the oldest books in the world. This leads to some interesting emendations and comments. For example, he adapts the question that the sybil asks of Odin (and the audience) in *Völuspá*: *vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?* ('do you know more or what?') in every stanza from 27 to 31. Schimmelmann's idiosyncratic reading of the *Edda* connects Old Norse religion with biblical narratives and seeks to prove connections, often with far-fetched etymologies and analogies. His comments show that he regards the *Edda* to be about Christian theology, a series of parables which allowed the people of the North to understand Christian thought. While he is keen to underline that he is not advocating 'heathendom', he is convinced that eddic poetry contains 'lessons'; for example, in a footnote to stanza 39 (40 in Schimmelmann's edition, *NK* 9) of *Völuspá* on the doom of oath breakers and murderers he comments: *Wie nett! Drückt sich hier die Sybille aus! um den Leser zum weiteren Nachdenken der zukünftigen Dinge zu bewegen* (1777: 20) ('How nice! the sybil expresses herself here! to move the reader to further think about future events [i.e., the hereafter]'). There is a special importance in that pre-Conversion and thus pre-Catholic texts had some kinds of 'truths' for Protestant pastors, such as Arnkiel and Schimmelmann, since they underlined a Germanic exceptionalism, which is divorced from Roman (and by extension Catholic) ideas.

Such ideas matured and intensified with subsequent generations; whereas most early modern views of Old Norse religion were largely those of superstition, later attitudes, as exhibited by the Grimms, Ludwig Ettmüller (1802–77) and Karl Simrock, saw Christianity as the adversary of Norse paganism, which was responsible for the destruction of many 'original' concepts. These appar-

[2] Schimmelmann has some rather bizarre criticisms of Mallet's translation which indicate that he was slightly out of his depth; for example, he criticizes Mallet's use of 'Goddesses' for *Ásynjur* as *grundfalsch* ('absolutely wrong'), since it should be *Asinerinnen* (1777: 220).

ently contained much information about the native character and culture of the Germans which now had to be reconstructed through painful 'source work'. Such thinking does not mean that any of them harboured intentions to convert to paganism. In fact, Simrock remained a devoted Catholic throughout his life. Nevertheless, there was an assumption that Christianity, and especially Catholicism, had displaced Norse religion and with that also the culture and literature that came with it (Ettmüller 1830: vi). Neither the Grimms nor Ettmüller were interested in the veracity of the Old Norse pantheon; rather they wanted to explore the cultural concepts of the past.

The Grimm brothers Jacob and Wilhelm (1785–1863 and 1786–1859) are arguably the most important influence on the reception of Old Norse religion in the German-speaking regions (an influence that also spread to England via John Mitchell Kemble and James Stalybrass's translation).[3] For the Grimms myth and folklore are entwined, which is why they mined German folklore for comparisons with Norse myths. The folk tales were seen as vestiges of 'original' beliefs, whereas Christianity was an imported faith. Jacob Grimm writes in his *Deutsche Mythologie* (1875: I, 3) that Christianity was alien to the Germanic people: *Das christenthum war nicht volksmäßig, es kam aus der fremde, und es wollte althergebrachte einheimische götter verdrängen, die das land ehrte und liebte* ('Christianity was not part of the people's culture, it was alien, and it wanted to edge out native gods whom the country honoured and loved'). Even more harshly described are those who tried to convert the Germanic people (1875: I, 4): *Die heidenbekehrer, strengfromm, enthaltsam, das fleisch tödtend, nicht selten kleinlich, störrisch und in knechtischer abhängigkeit von dem entlegenen Rom musten das nationalgefühl vielfach verletzen* ('The converters of heathens, excessively pious, abstinent, mortifying the flesh, often petty, hard-headed and living in slavish dependency to the remote Rome, must have injured national feelings many a time'). Grimm continues to depict Germanic paganism as life-affirming, albeit barbaric. The Christianization saw native deities transformed into devils or destroyed. Pious priests eliminated pagan poems, monuments and opinions — in short, they wiped out a whole culture. The *Mythologie* is an attempt to reconstruct whatever can be salvaged, thinking that it would be easier to reconstruct evidence from areas that had been converted later. Thus, Grimm argues, Germany is in a middle position between early and later conversions, which is why Old High German evidence (linguistically

[3] The Grimm brothers, their work and their importance in the reception of Norse mythology and religion are also discussed in Volume I, Chapter 7.1 and Chapters 3.5 and 10.1 in the present volume.

from areas in the south of Germany) is less 'original', since the people there were converted at an earlier stage than regions of the North (1875: 1, 7–8). The supreme area of preservation, however, is outside Germany in Iceland (1875: 1, 8). Therefore, he concludes, to question the authenticity of this preserved literature on Norse mythology is as unreasonable as it is to question the existence of the Scandinavian languages (*ibid*).

Ernst Ludwig Ettmüller (1802–77), who is better known today for his translations and interpretations of Old English, was also convinced that Christianity had driven native ideas underground (Ettmüller 1830: iv). Less dogmatic than Jacob Grimm, he appears to be specifically interested in supernatural and 'wise' Germanic women, an interest shared by earlier influential writers, such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who in his 1776 essay *Iduna oder die Äpfel der Verjüngung* states that Germans should know their 'Gothic' past (1776: 158), which includes poetry and mythology and a knowledge of German women. He argues (1776: 168) that these women, albeit not very bright, were nevertheless gifted in prophecy, as is apparent in Nordic sagas and poems.[4] Ettmüller was aware of Friedrich Gräter's *Nordische Blumen* of 1789, in which the author claims to have only chosen the most interesting pieces of Norse literature (1789: ix), among which are a lengthy discussion of 'norns' and other female deities. Gräter's modest claim in his preface (1789: ix) to offer a contribution to the knowledge of Norse poetry and mythology is belied by the range of sources he had consulted, which include sagas, as well as almost every interpretation to this point.

Karl Simrock was a life-long friend of the Grimms (to whom he sent almost all of his works for approval), but in many ways could not have been more different. Whereas the Grimms were progressive, Simrock was conservative, although he had a brief revolutionary spell in 1819, which saw him excluded from his work in a law office (Moser 1979: 49). With Simrock the study of Norse religion turned full circle, since he also believed that the Norse myths were true expressions of religion. Simrock (1851: 319) saw no contradiction in his regard for pagan religion, which he accredits with a lively literary culture, which is now lost: *Am meißten ist der Verlust unserer heidnischen Götter- und Heldesänge zu beklagen, welche lebhaften Ausdruck der ursprünglichen deutschen Weltanschauung enthalten haben müssen* ('The most deplorable aspect [of Christianization] is the loss of our pagan songs of the gods and heroes, which would have contained a vivid impression of our German world-view').

[4] On Herder see Volume 1, Chapter 5.1.

Myth as History

The North and particularly Iceland held a special place in German assumptions about the preservation of myth in the later eighteenth century. Several authors, from Jacob Schimmelmann onwards, considered the remoteness of Iceland as an ideal place for the preservation of 'ancient religion' (Krömmelbein 1998: 110). For Johann Gottfried Herder (1791: 694) Iceland — at the end of the inhabited world — was a place where *deutsche Fabellehren* ('German fables') were preserved or put together. Similarly Jacob Grimm declared (1875: 1, 8) that Iceland — *am abgelegensten ende des nordens* ('in the most remote part of the north') — acted as a place safe from the ravages of Christian missionary zeal. This 'emigration' saved Norse mythology, which would possibly otherwise have been eradicated in other Nordic countries.

The depiction of Iceland as a kind of retirement home for myths is also evident in Simrock's writings. His statement that Iceland is where the pagan Nordic spirit came to rest, just as a politician retires to loneliness at the end of his career (1851: 320), is not entirely flattering (1851: 319): *In Island, dem abgelegensten Winkel der Erde blieb er gleich den Gluthen [sic] des Hekla unter Schnee und Eis der Gletscher verborgen* ('In Iceland — this remotest part of the world it [the pagan spirit] remained hidden just as the embers of Hekla are hidden below the snow and ice of the glaciers'). He continues (1851: 320) by writing that when the Icelanders converted to Christianity, the spirit of Nordic paganism remained with them on account of their remoteness and poverty. No foreign clerics wanted to live in this cold island, and therefore the priests remained drawn from the native population and kept the language alive. Simrock clearly had only a very limited understanding of Icelandic geography and history, but it surely made good reading for his compatriots.

While Iceland is clearly credited with the preservation of Norse myths, there is no uniform answer as to how they got there in the first place: were they part of a pan-Germanic culture, which had died out elsewhere (Jacob Grimm), or had they been taken there as part of a cultural exchange? Some assumed the origin of Norse literature to have been in Germany and/or Denmark. Schimmelmann, for example, assumed that the themes of Norse literature were picked up in Germany by travelling Icelandic scholars, such as Ari Þorgilsson and Sæmundr Sigfússon, whom he assumed to have both studied in Cologne (1777: 2). The idea that Icelanders of the tenth and eleventh centuries travelled to Germany continued, for example, in the writings of Johan Joseph Goerres (1776–1848).

Others, such as August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735–1809), son of a Protestant clergyman, who studied Old Norse in Uppsala were more circum-

spect about such claims, but equally eager to present Old Norse literature as part of an historical inheritance. In 1773 Schlözer produced one of the first literary histories of Iceland in German, the two-part *Isländische Litteratur und Geschichte: von der Upsalischen Edda*. Schlözer's interest in the North went much further — he had previously published a history of the North, *Allgemeine nordische Geschichte*, in 1771 — as well as geographical descriptions and economic histories. His Icelandic literary history contains a part on the Uppsala *Edda* in which he explains Old Norse metre and kennings, as well as some of the work's content. He writes (1773: 1, 43): *Die nordische Dichtkunst war weit schwereren und mereren* [*sic*] *Regeln unterworfen als die Griechischen und die Römischen, ja als die Dichtkunst aller bekannten Europäischen Völker* ('The Nordic poetic art has more difficult and harder rules than Greek and Roman [poetry], indeed more than any other poetry of all known European peoples').

Ettmüller firmly denies any suggestions of friendly contacts between Scandinavians and Germans in the Middle Ages, since, as he states (1837: xviii), the 'Northmen' and Germans had been at war since the eighth century and throughout most of the High Middle Ages. He considers instead that there may have been earlier friendly contacts, such as the unification of Germans and Danes in the people of the Anglo-Saxons (1837: xviii). This grand sweep allows him to locate the origin of the eddic poems in Germany, where they were part of the Nibelungen legend. The problem of such assumptions is that historical figures in the narratives need to be accommodated, such as fifth-century Attila, who is Atli/Etzel in the poems. Ettmüller agrees with Wilhelm Grimm that the Nibelungen legend has an historical as well as a mythological origin, but he states that history and myths were already joined by the fifth century (1837: xxxiv) — which is conveniently just before the migration of the Anglo-Saxons to England. Unlike other nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars, he regards Sigurðr/Siegfried as a mythic rather than a historical figure, as a god of light who defeats the ruler of the realm of death and darkness (Niflheim) and steals his treasure, before he is killed by the son of terror, Högni/Hagen (1837: xxx–xxxi). He considers that some poems in the eddic canon are later adaptations and additions, such as *Guðrúnarkviða in þriðja* ('The Third Lay of Gudrun') and that they are therefore 'weaker' (1837: xxxvi). Ettmüller spends much effort on his dating in order to show that those poems that are closer to the German *Nibelungenlied* are older than others and thus 'more original'. His reasoning for the dating of poems is not always based on linguistic and stylistic comparisons though; for example, he considers *Guðrúnarkviða in þriðja* is later because of Guðrún's behaviour towards Atli: 'Why' he writes 'should Gudrun demand of Atli to be nice, she who is never nice to him?'

In contrast to Ettmüller and later Simrock, who considered the Poetic Edda to have German roots, its other early editor and translator, Friedrich Rühs (1781–1820), considered it to be Anglo-Saxon in origin. Rühs, a student of Schlözer, grew up in Greifswald, which was under Swedish rule until 1815. He studied a range of Scandinavian languages and became one of the first professors at the newly-founded Humboldt University in Berlin. Rühs was what we may consider a Protestant Prussian patriot. He managed to ruffle a number of his contemporaries' feathers with his views that Old Norse literature was derived from Old English. Rühs can be credited with producing the first translation of the Poetic Edda in prose in 1812, together with a geographic description of Iceland, its historical background and some words on poetry. For example, he thought that snippets of poetry which occur in sagas are the invention of the saga writer (1812: 97). In contrast to Ettmüller and the Grimms Rühs did not believe that there is anything German about the Poetic Edda, and he states categorically (1812: 7) that 'Germanic' does not equate to German. His translation, which is dedicated to Rasmus Nyerup, is an attempt to offer a Nordic history and mythology, since, as he states in his preface (1812: 3), there are currently no reliable editions, even in the Scandinavians countries. Rühs is a historian and is consequently interested in the historical background of Norse literature. He writes (1812: 4) that Norway's early history is pure fiction, but Icelandic historical sagas retained more credible accounts than those found in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Rühs's publication elicited sharp criticism from the Grimms who were working on their own translation of the Poetic Edda and he retaliated with a vicious response in 1813, *Über den ursprung der isländischen poesie aus dem angelsächsischen*. Rühs argues that the Edda had been brought to Iceland by Anglo-Saxons. His reasoning is based on stylistic similarities between Old English and Old Norse poetry as well as the fact that both languages use the letters thorn <þ>, ash <æ> and eth <ð> in their orthography. The Grimms, he argues (1813: 15), have only scant knowledge of Scandinavian languages, and their comparative mythology is faulty since comparing sources from different cultures and periods, such as Roman or even Indian, leads to gross distortions (1813: 33).

The historian Friedrich Majer offered a gentle response to Rühs in 1818. Majer, who had translated and edited some material from Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (notably *Gylfaginning*) and the Poetic Edda, argued that the Poetic Edda was of pre-Christian date and that the mythology undoubtedly seemed to mirror the climate and nature of the North, but that it contained too many goddesses and gods for one region alone and that for this reason it must have incorporated the myths of others (1818: xiii).

Karl Simrock argues that Norse mythology is German because of shared commonalities:

> Daß die Götter des Nordens auch die unseren waren, daß beide Bruderstämme der deutsche und nordische, wie Sprache, Recht und Sitte, so auch dem gemein hatten daß Odin Wuotan ist und Thor Donar, daß Asen und Ansen, Sigurd und Siegfried nur andere Formen derselben mythischen Names sind, darüber bleibt uns längst kein Zweifel. Wie kommt es denn, daß wir gegen die nordische Mythologie noch immer so gleichgültig thun? (1851: 317)
>
> (That the gods of the North were our own, that the two tribes of brothers, German and Nordic, had a common language, laws and culture, and that Odin is Wuotan, Thor Donar, and that Æsir and Ansen, Sigurd and Siegfried are just forms of the same mythical names, is without a doubt. How then can we be so indifferent towards Norse mythology?)

Simrock is keen to bring the Poetic Edda 'back' because (1851: 331): *uns gehört sie genauso gut wie den Dänen und Schweden, die es sich gewöhnt haben sie als ihr ausschließliches Eigenthum zu betrachten* ('it belongs to us in the same way as it does to the Danes and Swedes who got used to regarding it [Edda] as their exclusive property'). Despite the 'nordic' colouring Germans should not give up on claiming it as their own (1851: 331). An even bigger claim, according to Simrock (1851: 332), can be made on the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda, since places and characters in them are essentially German. His commentary tries to shoehorn as much of the Nibelungen narrative as possible into his explanation. His benchmark for authenticity is whether characters in these poems can also be found in Middle High German literature.

Myths Retold[5]

Whereas Arnkiel left his post in 1684 when Apenrade became Danish, there were several German authors who not only found employment in Denmark but were significantly influenced by a renewed interest in Norse literature. Johann Elias Schlegel (1719–49), member of the influential Schlegel family, was born in 1717 and was a fellow pupil of Klopstock. In 1745 he accompanied a relative to Denmark as a private secretary. Schlegel became enamoured of his new country and learnt Danish. This allowed him to take up a prestigious extraordinary professorship at the academy in Sorø. Schlegel's extensive work

[5] Some of the material in this section is covered in greater detail in Volume 1, Chapter 5.1.

on Danish theatre (*Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters*, 1746) led to his use of Danish historical figures instead of Greek and Roman legends in his tragedies. His most famous is *Canut*, which relies on sources such as Thormod Torfaeus and Saxo (Schlegel 1971: 217). While Schlegel had a vivid interest in Denmark's history, mythology does not play a part in *Canut*. This interest in historical sagas is shared by few other German writers, most notably Theodore Fontane (1819–89), who was an observer of the Prussian–Danish war in 1864 when he wrote one of his most famous poems about Gorm the Old, *Gorm Grymme*.

Schlegel's fascination with Denmark, however, had a lasting effect on his friend Friedrich Klopstock (1724–1803), who visited him a number of times before taking up residence himself in Copenhagen in 1751. There was little call for writers such as Schlegel and Klopstock at the court of Prussia's king Frederik the Great, who had very famously responded to the gift of an edition of the recently discovered *Nibelungenlied* that he would not suffer such rubbish in his library. Eighteenth-century German princes had yet to be convinced that any of their 'barbarian' ancestors had merit. In contrast, Scandinavian kings offered employment and patronage to a range of German exiles, who established a circle of German writers in Copenhagen (Döring 1880: 3), which was in close contact with Scandinavian poets, such as the Norwegian Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754). Klopstock's odes, such as *Wingolf* (1747) or *Skulda* (1766) are inspired by Norse mythology, but he is equally influenced by Ossian. While Klopstock continues to be interested in Norse mythology, he is better known for his patriotic works on Arminius/Hermann and his religious epic *Der Messias* (completed 1773).

Contemporary with Klopstock was Heinrich Wilhelm Gerstenberg, son of an officer in the Danish service who took up residence in Copenhagen from 1765 onwards. His 1766 poem *Gedicht eines Skalden* is an adaptation of *Völuspá* complete with a glossary of Nordic gods and beings — not all of them accurate. For example, he states (1766: 2) that Niord is a giant or half-god who is a poet in the Poetic Edda. Gerstenberg had been interested in Germanic poetry even before he took up residence in Copenhagen. In 1755 he published a pamphlet on *Poesie und Germanen* in which he criticized Klopstock for not covering the most worthy sources, which to him were those of the North (1755: 9). His play *Minona* (1785) contains Anglo-Saxon princes, Pictish slaves, Romans and German dukes, but also Norse mythology. How little his contemporaries knew of Norse mythologies is evident from his explanatory notes, such as the one in which Odin is compared to Mohammed, because he also promises the fallen warriors beautiful maidens and plenty to drink (1785: 375). Poets such

as Klopstock and Gerstenberg, but also Herder, who included *Skaldenlieder* in his collection of *Volkslieder* (1778), paved the way for a growing interest in Norse literature. Herder's 'folk-songs' are translations from Hickes, Mallet, Bartholin and Resen, and include a version of *Völuspá, Das Grab der Prophetin* ('The Prophetess's Grave').

Friedrich Gräter (1768–1830) was the first German student of Old Norse myths who did not live in the sphere of the cultural influence of Denmark. Born in Swabia he took a keen interest in Norse literature, which he offered as *Nordische Blumen* (1779), a collection that contained some translations of eddic poems. Despite having to work from translated versions, he offers careful translations of the Old Norse texts. Here is the beginning of *Þrymskviða*:

> Entzürnt war Thor
> Als er erwachte
> Und seinen Hammer
> Vergebens suchte,
> Er rüttelte den Bart
> Und schüttelte das Haupt!
> Umher mit den Händen
> Griff er, der Erde Sohn. (1779: 93)

(Thor was angry | when he awoke | and searched in vain for his hammer. | He ruffled his beard, | he shook his head. | He groped around with his hands, | the son of the earth.)

The period between 1808 and 1830 sees a variety of translations and versions of Old Norse literature, mainly of *Snorra Edda* and the Poetic Edda. Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen (1780–1856) was a prolific editor and translator of medieval German and Scandinavian literature. Von der Hagen produced his version of the *Nibelungenlied* in 1803, and like so many others, regarded the Old Norse Sigurd poems as versions of the same material as the Middle High German poem. In 1814 he edited parts of *Snorra Edda*, *Völsunga saga*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Norna-Gests þáttr* and *Blomsturvalla saga* as *Altnordische Sagen und Lieder welche zum Fabelkreis des Heldenbuchs und der Nibelungen gehören* ('Old Norse Sagas and Songs Which Belong to the Legends of the Book of Heroes and the Nibelungen Cycle'). These very disparate texts and his lack of language skills earned him the scorn of the Grimms, but he continued to produce editions and translations of Old Norse literature. The Grimms published their *Lieder der alten Edda* in 1815. Like von der Hagen they had entered into correspondence with the influential Danish librarian and keeper of antiquities Rasmus Nyerup (1759–1829) to obtain a transcript of the Poetic Edda manu-

script, but they had also sent a delegate, Hans Georg von Hammerstein, to Copenhagen to speak on their behalf (Seidler 2014: 53). It seems that the Edda translation project — which included the *Prose Edda* — was one of the most competitive undertakings of the early nineteenth century: the Grimms, von der Hagen, Gräter and Friedrich Christian Rühs (1781–1829) all strove to be the first translators of these works into German, and considerable animosities were exchanged in letters and publications about each other's shortcomings (Seidler 2014: 134–57). Translations were announced in newspapers and denounced by rivals, but what really hampered the translators' efforts was access to the original manuscripts and in some cases, such as that of the Grimms, the search for a suitable publisher. While the efforts of these learned men were noted by contemporary scholars and enjoyed some success (for example, von der Hagen's *Altdeutsche und Altnordische Helden Sagen: Wilkina und Niflunga Saga oder Dietrich von Bern* had a second revised print run in 1855), they remained quite unknown to most of their fellow Germans for whom they professed to write all of this material. Gustav Thormod Legis translated the Dane Adam Oehlenschläger's *Nordens Guder* in 1829 as *Götter des Nordens: epische Gedichte in drei Büchern* ('Gods of the North: Epic Poems in Three Books'). This work is similar to Gerstenberg's *Gedicht eines Skalden*, which is more of an adaptation that a faithful translation of the originals.

Ludwig Uhland (1787–1862) was Gräter's compatriot, but instead of translations he offered an enquiry into the various sources of Old Norse literature. Born and raised in Swabia, his interest in German medieval literature led him to Norse myths. He published *Der Mythos von Thôr nach nordischen Quellen* ('The Myth of Thor According to Norse Sources') in 1836. Uhland's study of the Norse god is informed by a detailed knowledge of various sources, including for example Rask's edition of both *Eddas* (1836: 224) and offers his readers a very full introduction to the material. He does this because (1836: 5): *In den isländischen Saga ist der ächte Mythenbestand häufig in wilkürliche gefalbelte hinübergespielt* ('In the Icelandic sagas the true myth is often randomly turned into tales'). Many of these tales, he writes (1836: 4), have been condensed, so that they need unravelling.

Shortly before Uhland, Ludwig Ettmüller published an edition and translation of *Völuspá* (*Vaulu-spá* 1830) alongside a detailed description of Norse gods and supernatural beings and some musings about the origin of Norse belief. Ettmüller's editions of *Beowulf* and Norse literature were significant for the development of Germanic philology. He wrote that in order to understand concepts of Norse mythology, we need to distinguish between 'folk poetry' (*Volksdichtung*) and 'artistic' poetry, which he referred to as *Skaldavísur*, and

that they are different in date, composition and content (1830: xvi). 'Folk poetry', he argued, is simple and serene and represents the gods as they were worshipped by people in antiquity. In this he distinguished Norse from other Germanic and Celtic belief systems. Ettmüller was not just familiar with eddic and skaldic poetry, but also drew on some of the sagas of Icelanders in his research. His grasp of skaldic poetry, however, was somewhat limited by the fact that he often tended to translate verse line by verse line, rather than unravelling the syntactic components, which normally occur across line boundaries. A relatively straightforward example is a *lausavísa* of Einarr Skúlason, whom he assumed to have lived in King Knut's lifetime (1830: xxiv). He was probably not too familiar with skaldic conventions, which leads to some peculiar translations. An example is a transcription of the first four lines of *lausavísa* 9 (stanza 2 in Ettmüller's edition), copied from Bartholin:

Brattr er balldekkr Þiöttu
Brynn gyrþill þvær virðum
Sundr brestr Lögu lindi
Lokn veltr um Þrom-belti[6]

Translated as:

Steil ist das Meer Thiatta's
Brünna's Gürtel bespielt Männer.
Gebrochen wird Laga's Woge,
Woge wird geworfen in Throms' Bande. (xxvi)

(Steep is the Sea of Thiatta | Brünna's girdle plays on men | Laga's wave is broken | Wave is thrown in Throms' bands.)

Nevertheless, to Ettmüller the metre and diction of Nordic verse are important parts of the poetry which need to be learned and understood, as well as rendered in translations. His critical stance on most earlier translations of eddic literature is evident in *Die Lieder der Edda von den Nibelungen* (1837), an anno-

[6] A modern comparative edition has:
Blárs baldrekr Síra;
Brú gyrðill þvær fyrðum;
sundr springr Lygru lindi;
Leku veltr af þrọm belti.
(Blue is the baldric of Sira <island> [SEA]; the girdle of Bru <island> [SEA] washes men; the band of Lygra <island> [SEA] bursts asunder; Lundr springs asunder, the belt of Leka <island> [SEA] rolls from the railing.) Translated by Kari Ellen Gade (Gade and Marold 2017: 172).

tated translation of eddic poems centred around Sigurðr. Ettmüller again edits a range of eddic and skaldic poems in 1861 for his *Altnordisches Lesebuch*, which combines a range of Norse texts with a grammar and dictionary for teaching.

A little later Simrock's desire to bring 'German' literature to a wider audience saw him including works such as *Beowulf* (1859), which he named the 'oldest German poem'. However, it is not Old English but Old Norse, and Old and Middle High German which underpin most of his work. For Simrock, the Nordic gods are also those of the Germans and his wish is to make people less indifferent to this legacy. Simrock's choice of poems in his version of the *Edda* focuses on what he perceived to be 'genuine' works of the pre-Christian period. Convinced that the core texts in eddic diction were as old as the sixth century and composed in Germany, from where they were taken to Norway, he denied (1851: 322) that Iceland is the place of origin of this poetry, but that it is merely the place in which it was preserved: *Die ächten alten Lieder wurden überhaupt nicht auf Island gedichtet sein: den Isländern gebührt nur der Verdienst der Erhaltung und Aufzeichnung, sie brachten sie schon aus dem Mutterlande mit herüber* ('The true old lays could certainly not have been composed in Iceland: the merit of their preservation and recording is due to the Icelanders, but they had already brought them with them from the Motherland'). This perception leads him to include some poems with apparent 'pagan' connotations, such as the antiquarian composition *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, but to exclude other late poems, such as *Sólarljóð* on account of its Christian content (1851: 322).

Simrock's translation of the Prose and Poetic Edda (1851: 333–35) considers *Völuspá* to be the most important poem, albeit incomplete and jumbled. While Simrock is quite free in his other translated works, he tries to stick to the alliteration of the original, rendering it sententious in parts. For example, in *Helreið Brynhildar* he renders the second stanza of the original (*NK* 219) as follows (1851: 187):

> Walländisches Weib,
> Was willst du suchen,
> Allgieriges Haupt, hier
> In meinem Haus?
> Du wuschst, Bewehrte,
> verlangt dichs zu wißen
> von den Händen dir manchesmal
> Menschenblut.

(Walland woman | what do you want | greedy head | here in my home? You washed armoured [lady], | if you want to know, | human blood | occasionally from your hands.)

The success of Simrock's works in the following decades was partly based on his translations of the *Nibelungenlied*; however, it paved the way for a much wider reception of Norse mythology in Germany. His achievement of popularizing this material may be explained by his adaptation of the originals to fit with other, native forms of narration for a German audience. An example is his version of *Völundarkviða*, entitled *Wieland der Schmied*, which he includes in the first volume of the *Amelungenlied* (1843), and which he regarded as his life's work (Moser 1979: 343). Simrock's poem has only fleeting similarities to the eddic poem, since his main source seems to be *Velents þáttr*, contained in *Þiðreks saga*, which he adapts liberally. The poem uses an imitation of the Middle High German Nibelungen stanza form, rather than eddic metre or the prose of the *þáttr*, to underline the German connection of the material. To understand how Simrock reworks his sources, we may look at an example of the *Amelungenlied*. Instead of the young women who flew into Mirkwood, according to *Völundarkviða*, the poem begins with an introduction of Wieland and his brothers:

> Es saßen drei Brüder zu Norweg in der Mark
> Von elfischen Geschlechte, heldenkühn und stark.
> Sie waren keinem Könige noch Fürsten unterthan:
> Den kunstreichen Männers getraute Niemand zu nahn…
> (Simrock: 1843: iv, 6)

(Three brothers sat in the Mark of Norway, of elvish origin, heroic and strong. They were not subject to any king or duke: Nobody dared to approach the artful men.)

In the poem the three sons are the offspring of Rán and Ægir, rather than Vaði (*Velents þáttr smiðs*) or a Lappish king. In order to make the narrative fit with other versions, Simrock continues to draw on various traditions; for example, he chooses to include a valkyrie and magic ring motif and makes Bathildis (Böðvildr) the opponent of the swan maidens.

The reception of Old Norse myths had a chequered history in Germany, which today is often superseded by studies of Wagnerian operas and Nazi-nonsense. Such myopic views belie the multifaceted history of Old Norse literature in Germany, from the didactic to the entertaining, often in competition and comparison with medieval German literature. The study of Old Norse mythology was undertaken with passion, involving some erudite scholarship but also some bizarre blunders. Arguably no other literature may lay a claim to having had such an impact on the genesis of a national identity which led to the eventual birth of a nation.

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2.2 – Finns, Sámi and Swedes

Thomas A. DuBois

It is fruitful to recognize the conceptual linkages between the idea of reception and the wider, more multidirectional process of 'interpenetration'. Over the course of millennia of close geographic, economic and cultural engagement, speakers of Germanic and Finno-Ugric languages in the Nordic region observed, shared and adapted each others' traditions, both religious and otherwise. Such exchange was a natural and expectable product of close and continuous contacts, which included intermarriage and occasional assimilation of one population into another. Disentangling such strands of mutual influence in order to arrive at some notion of an original, pre-contact religious tradition for any of the Nordic peoples is difficult, if not impossible, particularly since our data for any posited pre-contact era is scanty and remote, given the lack of written texts bearing on the subject. Archaeology allows us to trace the processes of intercultural contacts over time and can on occasion help reveal prior religious traditions or ideas that were eventually supplanted by new ideas borrowed from or influenced by neighbouring peoples. Comparative data can help us posit pre-contact forms — for example, by looking at common Indo-European features of mythology as compared to what we find in the medieval Scandinavian sources, or by looking at North Eurasian and Uralic mythologies as counterparts to the traditions of the Finns and Sámi.

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Increasingly in the twentieth century, scholars have also looked at variations *within* the Nordic cultures as indicators of possible vectors of influence: for example, by comparing Sámi traditions from areas of extensive Scandinavian contacts (like central and southern Sweden) with those attested for more remote regions (like northern Finland and the Kola Peninsula), it becomes possible to see how Scandinavian influences may have affected South Sámi traditions (Rydving 1992). Similarly, scholars in the area of Scandinavian pre-Christian religion have paid increasingly greater attention to the regional differences within the Norse world: differentiating, say, the traditions recorded in Iceland or located in Norwegian Hålogaland from those of southern Denmark or eastern Sweden. This increased sensitivity to regional variation allows for the possible reconstruction of local religious traditions with an eye to their reliance on, or influence from, the other cultures with which they had close contact. It becomes possible to recognize Celtic influences in Western Norway or Iceland, Sámi influences in Hålogaland and Finnmark, Continental influences in Denmark, and so on.

The earliest textual record we have of a Balto-Finnic religious tradition already shows extensive exchange with adjacent religions. A thirteenth-century birch-bark text written in Cyrillic and preserved by chance in the ruins of medieval Novgorod, contains a prayer or incantation addressed to *Jumolanuoli* ('Arrow of god') but also names the deity as *Bou*, apparently a borrowing of the Christian Russian term for the omnipotent deity *Bog* (DuBois 1999: 106; Holthoer 1981: 161).

Ample evidence points to the idea that Sámi and Finns also became aware of the Scandinavians' religious traditions and assimilated elements into their own practices. Sámi burial customs, for instance, changed over the Viking Age to include the deposition of metal grave goods, apparently in imitation of Scandinavian practice (Zachrisson 1987). As Håkon Rydving has shown (Rydving 1992), Sámi in the South Sámi area seem to have recognized similarities between the Sámi thunder god Dierpmis and the Norse god Þórr, altering the name of the Sámi god over time to Hovrengaellies 'Thunder man' in a way that reflects their awareness of concepts central to the Norse understanding of the nature of the god Þórr. The South Sámi term for thunder, *hovren*, derives directly from the Scandinavian theonym Þórr. Although early twentieth-century scholars tended to see such nomenclature shifts as evidence for cultural borrowing, more recent scholarship suggests more that the Sámi were showing their awareness of cultural parallels, making the terminological shift in a sense a very concrete instance of Sámi 'reception' of Old Norse materials.

The Development of Academic Approaches

The lands east of the Baltic Sea that today make up the country of Finland came under the control of Swedish monarchs during the twelfth century. From that period down to the beginning of the nineteenth century, Finland made up an increasingly integrated and important part of the Swedish realm. Because of the difficulties of crossing the sea during the winter, however, Finland remained largely cut off from the capital for a good part of the year, and as a result, it developed or retained independent institutions to a greater degree than its subject status would at first suggest. This geographic factor, coupled with the distinctiveness of Finnish as the common language of the majority of the region's populace, ensured that Finland and the Finns would be perceived as something separate from the rest of Sweden.

Textual commentaries on Finnish pre-Christian religion begin with Lutheran archbishop Mikael Agricola's 1551 verse catalogue of eastern and western Finnish gods, appended to his translation of the Book of Psalms. Agricola aims to demonstrate in his listing the deplorable state of religious instruction among his unlettered formerly Catholic flock, revealing the continuities of pre-Christian beliefs and customs that persisted among the Häme and Karelian peasantry (Hautala 1954: 27–30; Anttonen 2013: 467). Writing in Finnish, he seems to assume at least some familiarity on the part of the reader with the figures he mentions, but he also clearly refrains from dignifying his subject by furnishing too many details: *Epeiumalat monet tesse/muinen palueltin caucan ja lesse* ('Many false gods were worshipped here of old, both far and near') (Krohn 1932: 76). Finnish and Karelian gods are described as distinctive of the Finnish province's two main regional cultures, and no comparisons with the gods of the ancient Scandinavians are made. In contrast, the Swedish-born Petrus Bång, professor of theology at the west Finnish university of Åbo, and eventual bishop of the east Finnish diocese of Viborg, shows no hesitation in drawing parallels between the figures in Agricola's catalogue and Scandinavian gods. His *Priscorum Svea-Gothorum Ecclesia* (1675) provides a rendering of Agricola's verse in Swedish, drawing connections between the Finnish material and Swedish tradition in the very terms he uses for the translation (Bång 1675). Agricola's *Caleuanpoiat* is translated as *Jätterne* ('The Giants') connecting the Finnish tradition with Scandinavian giant lore. Bång recognizes a Scandinavian root in the term *Cratti*, which he translates *Skratten*, seeing the being's guarding of household goods as related to the Swedish word for treasure and tribute, *skatt*. Similarly, the household spirit that Agricola terms *Tontu* Bång renders as *Tompten*. And Agricola's *Ukoi* ('Ukko') he

glosses simply as *Thor* (Hautala 1954: 41). Bång's main aim is to comment on the gods of the Svear and Götar, and his inclusion of Finnish materials is thus clearly secondary. His reading of them as derivative of Swedish tradition reflects a by then entrenched colonial mindset that consistently subordinates Finnish and Sámi traditions to Swedish at every turn. These tendencies find their most memorable enunciation in Olof Rudbeck's inventive multivolume history of Swedish civilization *Atland eller Manheim*, a work that grounds Sweden and the Swedish people in biblical as well as classical contexts (Rudbeck 1679–1702). It is largely as an answer to this Gothicist fantasy that Daniel Juslenius penned his equally imaginative history of the city of Åbo, *Aboa vetus et nova* ('Åbo Old and New') (Aboæ 1700). Juslenius explains the Finns as the descendants of the biblical Magog and identifies Åbo as the cradle of all civilization. According to Juslenius, the Finns taught civilization to the Swedes, who then eventually passed the knowledge along to the peoples of the Mediterranean (Juslenius 1700).

A more ethnographic approach to the religions and cultures of the Scandinavians' Finno-Ugric neighbors emerges in the works of Olaus Magnus (1490–1557) and Johannes Schefferus (1621–79). Olaus offers an overview of the history and cultures of the Nordic region, drawing heavily on Saxo Grammaticus, but also supplementing textual sources with observations of his own regarding the ways of life and customs of Sámi and Finnish peasants as he came to know them through his church-related travels in pre-Reformation Sweden (Olaus 1555). The German-born Schefferus compiled an encyclopedic work about the Sámi entitled *Lapponia*, a text that draws on ministers' accounts to construct a picture of the shamanic practices and belief system of the Sámi (Schefferus 1673). This exoticized depiction of Sámi religion in particular is continued variously in the works that resulted from the Lutheran mission to the Sámi spearheaded by Thomas von Westen (1682–1727) but shared by a wide circle of highly educated and literate fellow ministers. Von Westen interrogated Sámi *noaiddit* ('shamans') in the parishes he visited, questioning them closely on their beliefs and practices and recording his findings in a 'know thy enemy' manner in a series of now lost 'confession books'. The tracts of writers like Knud Leem (1696–1774), Hans Skanke (1679–1739) and Jens Kildal (1683–1767) draw on similar materials and recount local Sámi names of deities as well as rituals that the writers had personally observed, read about in von Westen's notes or heard tell of (Leem 1767; Kildal 1945; Skanke 1945). In none of these works are links with Scandinavian pre-Christian religion widely discussed, although their observations become prime sources for later scholarly explorations along these lines.

It is with the works of the eighteenth-century Finnish scholars Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739–1804) and Christfrid Ganander (1741–90) that a systematic counter to the Gothicist tendencies of Bång, Rudbeck and Juslenius emerges. Both Porthan and Ganander look to Finnish folk-songs, place names and incantations to furnish evidence for pre-Christian Finnish beliefs, supplementing for the first time prior scholars' singular reliance on Agricola's brief catalogue. Porthan's *Specimen academicum de Superstitione veterum Fennorum theoretica et practica* (Aboæ 1782), published at the expense of his student Christian Eric Lenqvist, uses Porthan's own knowledge of peasant beliefs and practices, combined with those of Lenqvist's minister father, to create the first truly detailed account of pre-Christian Finnish gods, rituals and customs (Porthan and Lenqvist 1782). Ganander's *Mythologia Fennica* (1984 [1789]), arranged not as a monograph but as a lexicon, contains hundreds of terms for particular gods and mythological details, arranged alphabetically.

For Ganander, like his friend and correspondent Porthan, the chief point of comparison for his Finnish and Sámi materials are the traditions of ancient Greece and Rome. In his introduction, Ganander speaks knowledgeably about Homer, Herodotus and Ovid, and he uses classical literature as a framework for understanding the gods and behaviours he presents. This framework is also generalized to serve as a reflection of all mythologies of the world. As he states (1984 [1789]: 2): *Sådane äro Gudarne hos Homerus, sådane voro de hos de uplyste Romare, och sådane äro de i denna dag hos Samojederne och Villarne i Canada* ('Such are the gods of Homer, such were those of the enlightened Romans, and such are those found today among the Samoyeds and savages of Canada'). When Ganander mentions (1984 [1789]: 3) that *Götherne* share on occasion beliefs with Romans, Greeks, Finns and Sámi, it is not through any process of influence or exchange, but rather through the same putative human tendencies, the commonalities of an underlying world mythology. Later in his introduction, however, Ganander focuses more explicitly on the idea of comparison and influence, noting that he has chosen to place Finnish and Sámi mythologies alongside each other because of their linguistic interrelation and historical commerce, and that occasionally he has drawn comparisons with *den äldre Svenksa Mythologien* ('the older Swedish mythology') which may not share the same mythological names but certainly shares some of the same ideas, due to processes of cultural contact, commerce and intermarriage (1984 [1789]: 7). Sámi, Finnish and Samoyed affinities had already been recognized by E. J. Björner (Björner 1748), who explained them by positing the three cultures' mutual derivation from the biblical Samaritans, a theory which updated and extended Ericus Cajanus's 1697 dissertation linking the Finnish language

with Hebrew. The less impressively biblical affinities of Sámi and Hungarian had been pointed out by János Sajnovics (1770) and Johan Ihre (1772), the latter of whom Ganander lists as one of his chief sources. Ganander also relies on Olof von Dalin's *Svea Rikes Historie* (1747–62), a work that had definitively replaced Rudbeck's volumes.

Equating Folklore with Antiquity

With the shift of the Agricola-derived treatises of earlier centuries to the Enlightenment works of Porthan and Ganander, the body of evidence drawn on for theories regarding ancient Finnish mythology broadens to include songs, incantations and place names. Such can be seen as a solution to the dearth of Finnish textual evidence that had come down from the Middle Ages, but it also reflected the era's new enthusiasm for oral tradition, occasioned by the publication of James Macpherson's 'translations' of Scottish epic poetry. Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760) and his subsequent *Fingal* (1762) seemed to furnish evidence in a persuasive and convincing manner of the survival of verifiable ancient history in the oral traditions of unlettered peasants, however disputed this view was to become in the coming decades (Macpherson 1995). For intellectuals like Porthan, Macpherson's poems and essays opened up new vistas for recovering a Finnish past otherwise completely obscured by the mists of time. In the nineteenth-century rise of Romantic nationalism, Finnish oral tradition — particularly the epic songs of eastern and northern Finns and Karelians — became prime sources for the reconstruction of ancient history, sources that connected Finland not with its former colonial ruler to the west but rather with an independent history somewhere in the east. The passage of hundreds or even thousands of years was seen to have had little effect on the materials thus gleaned, apart from the sometimes evident influences of the cult of the saints and other perceived failings of the Catholic era. In this way — and similarly, in the Scandinavian embrace of ballads and legends as sources — similarities in topic or theme between nineteenth-century antiquarian notations and medieval textual accounts became viewed as proof positive of unbroken cultural continuity. Thus folklore materials became evidence for the study of pre-Christian mythology. This yearning for history is evident in the writings and epic projects of Elias Lönnrot (1802–84), whose literary epic *Kalevala* first appeared in 1835 and then in expanded form in 1849 (Lönnrot 1993).

Literary Epics as Scholarly Reception

Lönnrot's project was shaped by the Macphersonesque proto-Romanticism of Porthan, but it also responded in crucial ways to literary and intellectual developments happening in Sweden. Arvid August Afzelius and Erik Gustaf Geijer's *Svenska folkvisor från forntider* (1814) served as a further impetus to Finnish and Estonian nationalists of the eastern Baltic. Both men were instrumental in the 1811 founding of the Götiska förbundet, an organization of writers, scholars and intellectuals who fused interests in the medieval era with agrarian folklore and championed the notion of a heroic Viking as the epitome of Scandinavian (Swedish) culture. Afzelius was also the editor of a translation of the *Poetic Edda*. As Jouko Hautala has shown (Hautala 1954: 90–92), the University of Uppsala served as a prime context for Finnish Romantic nationalists in the early nineteenth century, despite the fact that Finland had already passed by then to Russia as an autonomous grand duchy. The Finnish students at Uppsala A. J. Sjögren (1794–1855), Abraham Poppius (1793–1866), A. I. Arwidsson (1791–1858) and C. A. Gottlund (1796–1875) were all exposed to Swedish national Romanticism at the same time and banded together to create a Finnish response in their thinking and scholarship. Sjögren went on to become an important academic in St Petersburg. The more fervently nationalist Arwidsson was eventually exiled by the Czarist government and lived out his career in Sweden, where he became important as an editor of Swedish folksongs. He is famous for the statement *Svenskar äro vi icke längre, ryssar vilja vi icke bli, låt oss alltså bli finnar* ('Swedes we are no longer, Russians we do not wish to become, let us therefore be Finns'). Gottlund sought out and collected folklore both in Finland among Finnish-speaking populations and in Värmland (remnants of earlier state-supported migrations of Finns from Savo to Sweden). Gottlund formulated the idea of creating a national epic for the Finns out of folk-songs, although it was not he but rather his academic rival Elias Lönnrot (educated in Åbo) who carried the plan to fruition. Poppius collected folk-songs in Finland and stated the group's attitude well when he exclaimed in a letter (Hautala 1954: 93): *Me olemme toista kansakuntaa, ja meidän esi-isiemme rinnat olivat yhtä karvaiset kuin konsanaan göötties, vaikka he eivät olleet niin kuuluisia merirosvoja* ('We are a different nation, and our forefathers' chests were just as hairy as the Götar's, although they [our ancestors] were not as famous as pirates').

Crucial in Scandinavian Romantic nationalism was Esaias Tegnér's literary reworking of *Frithiofs saga* (1825), a literary epic that moulded the prose text of a medieval saga into an appealing poetic inscription of nineteenth-century

Swedish notions of nation, romance and religion. It served as a largely unacknowledged but influential model for both Lönnrot's *Kalevala* and its Estonian counterpart, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* (1857–61) (DuBois 2009). Tegnér's text makes abundant reference to pre-Christian gods and practices, but renders these in a manner that announces his culture's eventual and laudable abandonment of heathen ways for belief in Christianity. It is his epic's villain character who has the most fervent attachment to the old gods, and in the last part of the epic, a pagan priest enunciates the idea of primitive monotheism, that is, that all thinking pagans could imagine and actually believed in a single omnipotent deity, although they had no firm idea of who He was until the coming of Christian missionaries. In a similar fashion, as Pentikäinen has shown, Lönnrot inserts a supreme *Ukko ylijumala* ('Ukko god above') as the ultimate source of power and object of entreaty in his literary epic *Kalevala* (Pentikäinen 1989). This editorial move differs from Lönnrot's source incantations, which either reference Christian saints and the Christian God, or refer to particular mythic figures (e.g., Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen) with no reference to a supreme deity. Here again, as in many aspects of Finnish Romantic nationalism, Swedish models form an important source of inspiration and detail.

FF Communications[1]

By the end of the nineteenth century, much of the Romantic tinge colouring scholarly approaches to medieval texts and folklore had faded. A new scientific discourse had now arisen, one steeped in notions of verbatim collection and cross-cultural comparison. A new organization, the Folklore Fellows, arose in 1910 as the cooperative venture of the Finn Kaarle Krohn and the Swede Carl W. von Sydow. The articles and reports of the *FF Communications* series reflect editor Krohn's ambitions to develop a discipline of folklore operating with scientific methods, one far removed from the literary and overtly nationalist agendas of the field's antiquarian past (DuBois 2010). Folk-tales are the prime interest of the series in its earliest years, and these are nearly always examined as narrative texts rather than as crystalizations of myths or folk beliefs. Tales are shown to jump cultural and linguistic boundaries with ease. Yet the older idea of confounding past and present and of using folklore as a device for reconstructing past mythology had not disappeared: Axel Olrik mined Norwegian missionary accounts of Sámi beliefs and practices for evidence regarding Thor's

[1] See also Chapter 3.6 below on the rise of folklore studies as a discipline.

helper Thjálfi, turning as well to legends collected in Småland and Lithuania (Olrik 1905); W. von Unwerth sought evidence of an Odinic death cult in Sámi accounts of Ruto (von Unwerth 1911); and Kaarle Krohn himself argued for the use of Sámi missionary accounts as faithful reflections of pre-Christian Scandinavian mythology (Krohn 1906). It was perhaps more a measure of these scholars' dim view of Sámi cultural independence rather than a methodological commitment to theories of diffusion that motivated these studies. But the result created a longstanding perception of Sámi pre-Christian religion in particular as a kind of passive repository of past pre-Christian Scandinavian beliefs, a perception that lasted well into the middle of the twentieth century.

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Part 3

Studies of Norse Myth and Religion in the Nineteenth Century

3.1 – The Character of the New, Comparative Scholarship

Margaret Clunies Ross

In Chapter 7.1 in Volume 1 of this study of the reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North, I discussed the first moves made within Old Norse studies towards a comparative methodology in scholarship devoted to religion and mythology. These began within the discipline of what we now call linguistics and followed the lead of scholars who worked with Asian languages and early religious texts in those languages, particularly those of Persia (now Iran) and the Indian subcontinent. Among Western scholars who were able to compare these new texts with those they already knew from the ancient Greek and Latin works that they had studied at school and university, there arose an awareness that some consistent linguistic and thematic parallels existed between the European classics and their languages and the classics of the Ancient Near East. Thus the concept that these languages and cultures must all be part of a large linguistic family of related cultures arose, and was crystallized around the image of a family tree, descent from which and through which was held to link many of the languages and cultures of both Europe and the Near East. This large language family is today termed the Indo-European group of related languages and cultures.

One of the fundamental intellectual tools in the establishment of the familial relationships between Indo-European languages was the development of

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a comparative philology, a means by which scholars were able to analyse the various languages to discover common and regular phonological variations and common grammatical structures. These analyses enabled them not only to establish the regular development of individual languages from older to more recent forms, but to show how groups of languages within the Indo-European family formed subgroups that were nevertheless related linguistically. Comparative philology soon extended its range in the first two decades of the nineteenth century to the Germanic languages with the work of Rasmus Rask in Denmark and shortly afterwards Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in Germany, as well as a number of lesser scholars. The initial work of these philologists was on the oldest forms of the languages themselves, as described in Chapter 7.1 of Volume 1, but it quickly extended to the oldest texts that were written in those languages, of which Gothic, Old English and Old Norse were the prime examples in the Germanic field, and then to the early religion and mythology of the Germanic peoples.

The link between comparative philology and the comparative study of religion and mythology was particularly strong because many of the earliest written texts to be found in Indo-European languages are religious in character or are records of an earlier set of beliefs or myths recorded by later custodians of that earlier culture. Hence it was that scholars interested in comparative linguistics often extended their range to the subject matter of the early texts that formed the primary evidence for the sound changes they studied. Rask stopped short of writing discursively about religion and myth: rather, he provided editions of the primary evidence for Old Norse mythology in the form of the Poetic Edda and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. The connection between comparative linguistics and comparative religion is also apparent in the work of Jacob Grimm, whose *Deutsche Grammatik* (first edition 1819; second edition 1822) preceded his *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), and, later in the nineteenth century, in the work of a number of scholars of Near Eastern languages, including F. Max Müller, who made his name as the editor of the Sanskrit hymns of the Rigveda before spending much of the rest of his life encouraging the study of comparative religion. Max Müller articulated the connection between source study and religion thus:

> It becomes therefore the duty of those who have devoted their life to the study of the principal religions of the world in their original documents, and who value religion and reverence it in whatever form it may present itself, to take possession of this new territory in the name of true science. (1873, 34)

The nineteenth-century excitement in Western Europe occasioned by the new awareness of early Sanskrit and Iranian religious writings, as well as the growing

contact with religious cultures from all over the world, from the Americas to China to Australasia, gave a tremendous boost to Europeans' interest in religion as a phenomenon of human culture and society. At the same time, most Europeans in the nineteenth century still professed some form of the Christian faith, which they regarded as the highest and most correct form of religious expression, certainly by comparison with what they regarded as the savage religion of the primitive tribes with whom contact was being made by ethnographers and missionaries in various parts of the nineteenth-century empires of European states. Consequently the comparative method in nineteenth-century religious studies inevitably involved the implication of hierarchy between and among religions and the establishment of theories that could explain not only the diversity of world religions themselves but the origins and purpose of religion as a phenomenon of human society.

These questions were not new: the biblical story of the Tower of Babel had been invoked in the Middle Ages to answer the question about religious diversity and euhemerism was drawn on to explain how people had been led to believe in gods that were not the Christian God, as several chapters in Volume 1 of this study explore. Another old theory, that of natural religions, was also sometimes used to explain how people untouched by Christian revelation had insights of a religious nature, particularly those which led them to believe that there was a single creator figure who had made the world. This notion, which we find in the Prologue to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (*c.* 1225), appears also in the writings of nineteenth-century historians of religion, especially in connection with the frequently expressed notion that the deities of primitive peoples were mythological expressions of the phenomena of nature and the weather.

In the second half of the nineteenth century a number of intellectual developments came together to focus attention on the nature of human society and the role of religion and myth within it. Fundamental to all of them, though not in fact essential to any of them, was the concept of progress, the idea that humans developed from a primitive state through various stages to the superior condition of modern Western man (and woman). The comparative method was then employed to collect materials from all over the world to demonstrate this progression and to establish its history. The publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* gave indirect support to the underlying evolutionary trend of comparative studies of religion and to the sense that there was some kind of continuity to be observed between the past and the present.

Two, or perhaps three, other emerging academic disciplines were central to the deepening and broadening scholarly and public interest in religion and mythology during the nineteenth century. These were archaeology, which in

turn had had its methodology influenced by the stratigraphical techniques of geology, and anthropology, whose name literally means 'the [scientific] study of the human race' (*OED* online, sense 2b, the first cited example in this sense being from 1832). Of these two disciplines which have become central in different ways to the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, archaeology was the older in terms of being established as an academic discipline during the first half of the nineteenth century with the work of the Danish archaeologists C. J. Thomsen and J. J. Worsaae, who used stratigraphic techniques borrowed from geology to date the assemblages and found objects in what became known as the 'three-age system' (the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages), which established at least a rough comparative chronology for the material finds from a period before the beginnings of historical records in Scandinavia. The subdiscipline of prehistory, to be contrasted with history, owes its establishment to these pioneering nineteenth-century scholars (*OED* online, sense 1a, the first example of the term, 'pre-history', being E. B. Tylor in 1871; cf. Daniel 1962; Gräslund 1987; Klindt-Jensen 1975: 46–83).

There is no doubt that the expansion of fieldwork-based archaeology, the growing sophistication of excavation techniques and, with them, the immense growth in the number and variety of material finds that relate to all kinds of human activity, including religious behaviour, has made archaeology a key player in the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North since the late nineteenth century. (Its contribution to the subject up to the present time is assessed in Chapter 10.4 below.) Yet the matter of how to interpret the material record of human activity based on archaeological evidence remains the Achilles heel of the discipline, and no more so than in the question of what the material evidence can tell us about human religious activity (cf. Hawkes 1954; Lucas 2012: 124–68).

The character of religion across all human societies and the reasons for its existence were also vital concerns of the subject of anthropology, which began to assume disciplinary status within the academy and outside it in the 1870s. The writings of some of the earliest anthropologists, such as the British scholars E. B. Tylor, R. R. Marett and W. Robertson Smith, advanced competing theories about the nature of the most primitive religious beliefs, as they saw them, and supported their ideas with cross-cultural comparisons with the practices of some of the peoples of the Americas, Africa and Australasia, whose ways of life were now the subject of reports and studies that resulted from direct observation of these usually non-literate societies. All these theories, like animism, totemism and the idea of mana (for a discussion of these terms see chapter 3.2 below), while based loosely on ethnographic data, were variants on the

concept that primitive peoples espoused a natural religion, in which they perceived supernatural powers to lie in inanimate objects, animals and features of the environment. Thus late nineteenth-century ethnography provided evidence for a new take on the old idea that the earliest religions involved humans' deification of natural phenomena, a view that can be traced back to the Stoic philosophers of antiquity (cf. Sharpe 1975: 5–6). The 'nature mythology' school of the late nineteenth century, including the work of Max Müller, Wilhelm Mannhardt and J. G. Frazer, the latter with his studies of sacral kingship and dying and resurrected gods of vegetation, exercised a powerful influence on several Scandinavian mythologists of the early twentieth century (e.g., Schück 1904; Ström 1954) as well as more widely on poets, artists and writers (on Frazer's extensive influence on literary authors, see Chapter 6.1.1 below).

Many of the nineteenth-century European scholars who wrote about religion conceived of its essence as involving the mental processes of the individual rather than the society of which that individual formed part. This was a natural assumption for them to make given that many were Protestants of one kind or another, used to thinking of religious belief as an inward, personal experience of the numinous. In the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth a group of French scholars, building to some extent on the sociological approach of Robertson Smith, began to change the emphasis of the anthropological study of the nature of religion towards the investigation of its social functions and towards an analysis of some of the key social processes or rituals that could be identified as religious in societies the world over. These included rites of passage that marked the main stages of human life from birth through the transition to adulthood via initiation to death (van Gennep 1909), the phenomenon of sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1899), the nature of magic and sorcery, the significance of gift and exchange (Mauss 1925) and the collective states of mind that supposedly allowed the separation of all things into the basic categories of sacred and profane (Durkheim 1912).

The shift from the study of religion as an individual experience to that of a social process was decisive in the twentieth-century development of social anthropology and religious studies, and the comparative method, combined with the emphasis upon fieldwork and participant observation of specific societies, produced a large number of detailed studies of religious practices in a variety of modern societies, such as those of the Australian Aborigines, where collective performance of ritual was still maintained. The influence of the French sociologists' work on the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North was by no means immediate, however, and has really only been felt from the last three decades of the twentieth century onwards. Nevertheless, in this period

it has been of great importance in establishing some of the fundamental ideological structures of Nordic religion as perceived through extant Old Norse texts (see further Chapters 10.3 and 10.4 below).

A consequence of the growing importance of ritual in the study of religion was that it provoked a debate about the relationship between ritual and myth in terms of the priority of the relationship between the one over the other. In 1889 William Robertson Smith delivered his influential *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* in which he proposed the primacy of ritual over myth, holding that myth is always secondary to ritual and offers an explanation of the communication between the world of humans and that of the gods, which, he argued, is the primary function of ritual. This view was certainly a fundamental tenet of the group often called the Cambridge ritualists (cf. Ackerman 2002), who wrote mainly about classical Greece. However, their influence was also felt in the study of Nordic religion, most obviously in the study by the Cambridge scholar Bertha Phillpotts (1920) of the possible origin of the poems of the Poetic Edda as the scripts for ritual dramas, a position also explored in respect of the eddic poem *Skírnismál* by Olsen (1909) and Dronke (1962). Gunnell (1995 and in later publications) has elaborated these ideas still further and developed them into a more thoroughgoing theory about the importance of drama and performance generally in the religious life of the early Scandinavians (see Chapters 5.1 and 10.3 below).

Another consequence of the myth-ritual debate at the turn of the twentieth century was that it paved the way for a gradual re-evaluation of the nature and status of myth in a religious context. Some of the main nineteenth-century theories of the nature of religion were remarkably hostile to myth and the language in which it was expressed. Many theorists who maintained that the basis of religion, even among so-called primitive peoples, was a perception of the infinite held that the elaboration of religious beliefs into a set of mythic narratives constituted a cultural decline, and that the various names of the deities and other supernatural beings in primitive religious systems could be understood as originally named for the major phenomena of nature. Although this version of the natural religion theory was very common in the nineteenth century, and persisted into the twentieth, it had the unfortunate side-effect of stunting the investigation of myth as a metalanguage and as a means of expressing in words what ritual often expressed in a combination of performance modes, including linguistic ones. It was not until the advent of structuralism in anthropology from the mid-twentieth century that a holistic theory of myth was developed, one that could in turn, from the 1970s, be applied to the myths of pre-Christian Scandinavia (see Chapter 10.3 below on this development).

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3.2 – The Nineteenth-Century Emergence of *Religionswissenschaft* and its Impact on the Study of the Pre-Christian Religions of the North

Bernhard Maier

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the pre-Christian myths and cults of Scandinavia had been studied mainly by philologists, linguists, archaeologists, antiquarians and folklorists. In the decades that followed, they became the focus of an emerging new academic discipline usually dubbed *Religionswissenschaft* or 'Science of Religion' (for comprehensive surveys of its history, see Sharpe 1975, de Vries 1977 and Kippenberg 2002; for its history in the nineteenth century, see Wheeler-Barclay 2010). Its rise — first at a conceptional rather than an institutional level — was due to a number of interrelated factors such as the upsurge of non-theological approaches to religion fostered by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the fascination with historical thinking and historical studies in the wake of Romanticism, the increase in knowledge about ancient languages and literatures generated by Orientalists and comparative philologists, the information on numerous hitherto unknown religions provided by missionaries and colonial administrators, the confident belief in the beneficial social consequences of scholarly progress fostered by the effects of the natural sciences on technological progress and — last but not least — the preoccupation of large segments of the educated public with specifically Christian religious problems in an age of increasing denominational diversification and growing secularization.

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As may be surmised from this enumeration of the most salient factors contributing to the alignment of the new 'Science of Religion', the study of the pre-Christian myths and cults of Scandinavia made but a minor and subsidiary contribution to the make-up of the new discipline. However, ongoing research on pre-Christian Nordic religion was significantly influenced by the pervasive general tendencies of *Religionswissenschaft*, which included a high esteem for the comparative method, an unashamed and sometimes unreflective dependence on specifically Christian (and often even more specifically Protestant) ideas, and a fascination with seemingly comprehensive, but retrospectively rather flimsy theories that were expected to unveil the 'nature' or 'origins' of religion. To appreciate the impact of these tendencies on the study of Old Norse religion, it seems best to consider each of them in turn (for near-contemporary historical surveys of nineteenth-century research on the pre-Christian religion of Scandinavia and the Germanic peoples in general, see Golther 1895: 1–53, and Chantepie de la Saussaye 1902: 7–48).

The early and abiding preference of religious studies for the comparative method, reflected even today in such designations as 'Comparative Religion' or *Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft*, may be taken to reflect the high esteem in which it was held by nineteenth-century linguists, philologists and biologists, prompting the confident assertion that 'all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison' (Müller 1873: 12). Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the use of the comparative method could reflect fundamentally different assumptions and presuppositions. On the one hand, there was the kind of comparison supposed to be modelled on that which was current in comparative linguistics and manuscript philology. In such cases, the comparison of an Old Norse god, myth, religious idea or religious custom with a parallel item drawn from Anglo-Saxon, Old High German, Celtic or otherwise Indo-European traditions was assumed to reflect a common origin and ultimate identity. Thus the comparison of Old Norse *Þórr*, Old High German *Donar* and Gaulish *Taranis* was based on the assumption that not only the names of, but also the ideas associated with, these deities could be derived from a common Indo-European prototype, an approach inaugurated by Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) and later pursued by such scholars as Adalbert Kuhn (1812–81), Wilhelm Schwartz (1821–99) and Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831–80) in his earlier writings. As late as 1889, the Swedish writer Viktor Rydberg (1828–95) confidently maintained that this kind of comparison made it possible 'to distinguish between older and younger elements of Teutonic mythology, and to secure a basis for studying its development through centuries which have left us no literary monuments' (Rydberg 1889: 21). By the end

of the nineteenth century, however, numerous philologically based parallels had come to be dismissed, as the establishment of rigid 'sound-laws' by the neogrammarians had shown that many equations, such as that between *Zeus* and *Týr*, were really spurious. This resulted in a kind of surrogate comparison, in which it was assumed that the two (or more) items compared could be derived from a common origin on structural grounds, even if there was no philological basis for this assumption, an approach that was later developed and refined most notably by Georges Dumézil (1898–1986) and his followers. By around 1870, prehistoric archaeology had also demonstrated that the history of human civilization stretched back much further than had been assumed in the early decades of the nineteenth century, so that even texts that were patently ancient could no longer be regarded as primitive. This prompted a rather different kind of comparison, in which the items involved were no longer held to be derived from a common origin but were merely assumed to be structurally or functionally similar. Thus it became fashionable to compare the gods, myths, religious ideas and religious customs of pre-Christian Scandinavia not only with items drawn from cognate Indo-European traditions but also with those of 'modern savages', whose mental make-up and habits of thought were supposed to be fundamentally similar, even if widely separated from the pagan Scandinavians both in time and in place.

The fact that most nineteenth-century scholars involved in *Religionswissenschaft* had a Christian (and, more usually, Protestant) background was of fundamental importance for the interpretation and classification of living religions, but also had implications for the study of Old Norse paganism. This is perhaps most pervasively apparent from the pivotal importance of the concept of history, pre-Christian Scandinavia being usually viewed and interpreted both in relation to the (hypothetically reconstructed) Common Germanic or even Indo-European religions that had preceded it and to the Christian faith which had replaced it. Occasionally, this perspective gave rise to far-flung compendia of religious history, such as the three-volume study *God in History* (1868) by Christian Charles Josias von Bunsen (1791–1860), in which the 'religious consciousness of the Teutons' is treated as a manifestation of 'Aryan religious belief' (Bunsen 1868: II, 395–422).

In accordance with the prevailing Christian world-view, history was supposed to reflect progress rather than decadence, so that the religious conditions of earlier periods were supposed to be cruder than those of later generations, whose religious ideas were generally taken to be both loftier and more refined than those of their ancestors. In general, Christianity or at least the modern European present as shaped by Christianity was held to be the apex

of this development, even by those who no longer claimed it to be based on a unique revelation. Significantly, the new 'Science of Religion' continued to use a technical vocabulary that was to a large extent based on biblical usage and in many cases reflected specifically Christian associations and oppositions. Thus 'religion' (in the modern Christian rather than in the classical sense of this term) was widely used with reference to pagan Scandinavia, although neither the term nor the concept which it denoted had an exact equivalent in Old Norse (or, for that matter, in many other civilizations to which the term had now come to be applied). Likewise, terms like 'magic' and 'superstition' were commonly used in a specifically Christian sense, implying negative associations and an opposition to the concept of 'religion' that were difficult to sustain in a non-Christian context. As might be expected, Christianity with its specific (and in some cases rather untypical) features generally determined what scholars expected to find in Old Norse religion, endless discussions of pagan 'beliefs' reflecting the pivotal role of discursive theology in medieval and modern Christian Europe rather than that which it may have had in the pre-Christian past. The fact that many scholars adhered to (or at least had been brought up in) one of the Protestant denominations also had an impact on the study of the pre-Christian past, as scholars tended to equate 'religion' with 'faith' in a specifically Protestant sense of the term, assuming it to reflect deep personal convictions and emotional involvement rather than mere formal affiliation. More specifically, interdenominational polemics, which had loomed large in scholarly debates ever since the Protestant Reformation, were still highly influential, making many scholars assume a high degree of continuity between the pagan and the medieval Christian periods.

Moreover, as the nineteenth century progressed, specifically Christian notions of promise and fulfilment, divine providence and the election of the chosen few came to blend with Romanticism, nationalism and even racism, luring scholars into interpreting elements of the pagan past as prefigurations of the Christian present. Jacob Grimm mused as early as 1844 that it was 'remarkable how the same soil of Old-German faith in Scandinavia and Britain proved receptive of Protestant opinion; and how favourable to it a great part of France was, where German blood still held its ground', concluding: 'As in language and myth, so in the religious leanings of a people there is something indestructible' (Grimm 1883: III, 1). In a similar vein, the Dutch theologian and historian of religion Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848–1920) claimed in 1902,

> Though our religion is derived from the Jews, and our culture from the classical nations of antiquity, our natural origins are to be found among the ancient Teutons.

> If we are not their offspring in a spiritual sense, they are yet our ancestors after the flesh, from whom we have inherited, in large measure, our way of looking at things, as well as numerous ideas and customs. (Chantepie de la Saussaye 1902: 1)

Yet despite the persistence and ubiquitous presence of specifically Christian or at least Christian-inspired patterns of interpretation, the advocates of *Religionswissenschaft* were generally unshaken in their confidence that an unbiased examination of the evidence on a global scale would reveal significant concurrences and thus a kind of universal common ground, making Max Müller choose the patristic phrase *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus* ('what [had been believed] everywhere, always and by everybody') as the motto for his programmatic *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (Müller 1873: iii). This buoyant confidence prompted the propagation of numerous ambitious theories, which on sometimes rather flimsy evidence claimed to be universally applicable, although in retrospect they can be seen to reflect the religious preoccupations of their proponents rather than those of the religions under consideration. In some instances, these theories were based on familiar lines of reasoning that stretched back as far as the pre-Christian Greek philosophers, whose arguments had been revived in different contexts and for different reasons by Church Fathers, Humanists and Enlightenment thinkers, which may in part account for their persuasiveness.

Thus the nineteenth-century obsession with 'modern savages' supposedly representing bygone stages of civilization may ultimately be traced back to the Greek historian Thucydides, revived by Roman ethnographers and Enlightenment historians (Nippel 1990). Similarly, the Romantic fondness for the interpretation of myths as allegories relating to natural phenomena has precursors in the pre-Christian Greek interpretation of the Homeric epics, Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian biblical exegesis forming a kind of missing link. The fact that the interpretation of the Norse myths as allegories of natural phenomena could easily be adapted to the Romantic concept of religion accounts for its popularity in the nineteenth century, as may be gauged from the writings of Kuhn, Schwartz and the poet Ludwig Uhland (1787–1862). Similarly, the recurrent interpretation of deities as divinized ancestors, heroes or social benefactors was forestalled by the Hellenistic mythographer Euhemerus, Christian writers having transmitted his theory on the origin of the Greek pantheon to the Middle Ages.

Some of the most influential theories, however, were largely creations of the nineteenth century, only some of their ingredients having earlier antecedents. Thus the anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) declared ani-

mism or the belief in souls and spirits to be the origin of all religions, assuming it to have predated both polytheism and monotheism (Wheeler-Barclay 2010: 71–103). Widely popular, the impact of his theory may be seen in the later work of Wilhelm Mannhardt. Basing his own alternative theory on observations supplied by the Anglican missionary Robert Henry Codrington (1830–1922), the anthropologist Robert Ranulph Marrett (1866–1943) held the belief in an impersonal force (Codrington's interpretation of the Melanesian term *mana*) to have predated animism, thus propagating the theory of 'Pre-Animism'. Yet another theory was favoured by the biblical and Semitic scholar William Robertson Smith (1846–94), who held totemism, or the sacrificial cult of an animal believed to be the divine ancestor of a kin-group, to be the earliest form of religion and at the heart of social organization. Significantly, Robertson Smith took primeval humanity's communal sacrifice of the ancestor deity to have foreshadowed the Christian concept of the god-man dying to achieve atonement, thus illustrating not only the ubiquitous evolutionism of his times, but also the pervasive influence which a scholar's highly individual preoccupation with specific religious ideas could have on his theorizing (Maier 2009; Wheeler-Barclay 2010: 140–80). While Robertson Smith still held Christianity to be based on a unique divine revelation and thus separate from the general religious history of mankind, his friend James George Frazer (1854–1941) made no such distinction, basing his encyclopaedic comparative study *The Golden Bough* (first published in two volumes in 1890) on both biblical and non-biblical, classical and modern ethnographic sources (Fraser 1990; Wheeler-Barclay 2010: 181–214).

Looking back on the nineteenth-century emergence of *Religionswissenschaft*, it is immediately apparent that a good deal of more recent research on Old Norse religion was (and to some extent still is) conditioned or at least coloured by its general tendencies and specific theories (for recent surveys, see: Buchholz 1994; Schjødt 2007; and Raudvere and Schjødt 2012). Thus the pivotal importance of the comparative approach appears to be undiminished, as geographically adjacent Sámi and linguistically cognate Germanic, Celtic and Indo-European beliefs continue to be used to shed fresh light on the Scandinavian evidence. Due to an increased awareness of the need for source criticism, modern ethnographic material of African, Asian, American or Australian provenance is indeed now quoted much more reluctantly than used to be the case a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the importance of such topics as the sacral kingship, the functioning of *Männerbünde* or the importance of shamanism in the study of Old Norse religion has to a large extent been conditioned by general theories based on modern ethnographic

evidence rather than on Old Norse texts. What also needs to be stressed is that the correct interpretation of parallels — that is, the distinction between common inheritance, borrowing in one direction or another, historical convergence due to similar operative causes or sheer coincidence — remains in many cases as disputed as it was in the nineteenth century, reflecting unsolved methodological problems. As regards the Christian background so much evident in nineteenth-century *Religionswissenschaft*, this is evidently no longer relevant in the form of theological presuppositions at odds with an historical interpretation of the evidence, but it may still be felt in the subtle influence of Christian theology or at least a specifically Christian world-view permeating much of the technical vocabulary and the analytical categories that are used to describe Old Norse religion, even if the terms used are of pagan rather than Christian provenance. Moreover, it could be argued that a kind of national Romanticism ultimately grounded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas is still operative, not least in the ways in which the results of scholarly research are mediated to the public. As regards the comprehensive theories favoured by scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these have indeed now been entirely abandoned, although terminological flotsam related to such theories as totemism and (pre-)animism may occasionally still be encountered in modern publications.

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3.3 – The Heavenly Mountains of Asia: Old Norse Religion and Comparative Religion

Annette Lassen

During the seventeenth century the vast majority of scholars of Old Norse mythology applied an euhemeristic approach to their subject; the medieval sources were rationalized historically and the narratives of *Ynglinga saga* and Snorri's *Edda* were taken at face value. The gods were believed to be human immigrants from Asia fleeing the military expansions of Pompey the Great (106–48 BC). When the accounts of such medieval texts differed in content, scholars, beginning with the influential Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605–75), hypothesized in a rationalistic manner that the discrepancies in the tales of Óðinn were caused by the fact that there existed three human beings with that same name (Lassen 2011: 25, 40). But, as Romanticism began to flourish in Germany, the euhemeristic paradigm soon became obsolete. This development may be dated to the first decades of the nineteenth century. A previously influential euhemeristic work on Old Norse mythology, written by Peter Friedrich Suhm (1728–98), 'the all-dominant historian-antiquarian' of the latter part of the eighteenth century (Leerssen 2016: 75), entitled *Om Odin og den hedniske Gudelære og Gudstieneste udi Norden* (1771), could now be characterized by N. F. S. Grundtvig, one of the major ideologues of Romanticism in Scandinavia, as *den kiedsommelige bog* ('that tedious book') (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1994: 163).

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The academic field of historical linguistics created a new discipline, *vergleichende Philologie* ('comparative philology'), which quickly influenced the study of literature, history and not least the study of myth (Shippey 2005: 1; see also Chapter 7.1. in Volume 1 of this study). Just as the young nations of Europe were interested in their own origins, scholars now also began searching for the origins of language and myth, the cradle of which was believed to be found in Asia. The comparative approach to mythology is intimately related to Orientalism and the Romantic paradigm of the time. It is in essence a mixture consisting of three main ingredients: the new and upcoming field of Indo-European linguistics; Friedrich von Schelling's (1775–1854) *Naturphilosophie* ('natural philosophy'), particularly his concept of the all-pervading *Weltseele* ('World Soul'); and Christian Gottlob Heyne's (1729–1812) conviction that myths explicate natural phenomena.

Christian Gottlob Heyne, who was professor of Greek at the University of Göttingen and a friend of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), is sometimes claimed as the founder of the study of mythology in Germany and elsewhere (Graf 1993 [1987]: 9). According to Heyne myths primarily serve to explicate natural phenomena (Graf 1993 [1987]: 10). This idea was later developed in numerous studies of comparative mythology, perhaps most notably in the works of Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), who for his part was also inspired by the imagery of the Sanskrit hymns of the *Rigveda*, in which a number of gods appear as deified natural phenomena. For example, the deity Sūrya is 'the all-beholding Sun', 'maker of the light' (Hymn 1.50, *To Sūrya*) and Vayu is the wind, whose 'Voice is heard, his shape is ever viewless' (Hymn 10.168).

But the interest of the Romantics in Old Norse mythology was to a greater extent and in more than one way heralded by Johann Gottfried Herder, who argued in *Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* (1796) that Old Norse mythology should have a similar role for the Germanic people as the Graeco-Roman variety had had ever since the fall of the Roman Empire (Herder 1998 [1796]: 162). In *Iduna* Herder also presented the proposition that myths originated in Asia, and urged that this hypothesis be investigated further. Herder's enthusiasm for the Orientalist approach reflected a growing awareness of the linguistic connections between European and Asian languages, following Sir William Jones' (1746–94) hypothesis, announced in his *Third Anniversary Discourse* (1787), that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin were genetically related and sprang from the same source (see further Chapter 7.1 of Volume 1 of this study). A couple of years earlier, in *On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India* (1784), Jones had compared Hindu deities with Graeco-Roman and Old Norse gods, arguing that

they must be related to one another, and suggesting that Óðinn and Buddha might be identical deities (Böldl 2000: 188–89; Leerssen 2016: 79).

This slightly earlier development may be considered the background to Herder's claim, expressed with conviction in *Iduna*, published a decade later, that *der Keim der 'Edda' ist aus dem Vaterlande aller Mythologien und Fabeln, aus Asien her* ('the seed of "Edda" derives from the Fatherland of all mythologies and fables, from *Asia*'). Herder even expressed a wish that The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen would organize an essay competion on the relationship between Old Norse mythology and the ancient religions of Persia and India:

> Offenbar ist diese Mythologie nicht an Einem Ort, nicht zu Einer Zeit entstanden. Große Weltstriche, lange Jahrhunderte trugen dazu bei; und ich wünschte von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu *Kopenhagen* die Preisfrage ausgesetzt: *aus inneren und äußeren Gründen zu untersuchen, wo, wann und wie in ihren Hauptvorstellungen und Sagen diese Mythologie entstanden sei* [...]. Sei die nordische Mythologie am Ida in Phrygien oder am Schwarzen Meer, am Kaukasus oder unter dem Nordpol entstanden: eine *ächte, reine deutsche Stammsprache* hat sie aufbewahrt, und *deshalb* wollen wir uns etwas von ihr zueignen. (Herder 1998 [1796]: 164)
>
> (Obviously, this mythology did not arise in one place, not at one time. Great distances and long centuries have made their contribution; and I would wish that the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in *Copenhagen* announced an essay contest: *to investigate inner and outer reasons, where, when and how the main concepts of this mythology and these tales arose* [...]. Did Nordic mythology originate at Ida in Phrygia or by the Black Sea, in Caucasus, or under the North Pole: a *genuine, pure Germanic stem language* has preserved it, and that is why we want to acquire something from it.)

Thus the methodological framework for the comparative approach to the study of myth was provided by linguists. Just as Sanskrit was believed to form the root of all Indo-European languages, the Indian myths were considered to surpass the antiquity of the Graeco-Roman or Old Norse myths. Within the new system of thought, Old Norse myths were no longer considered to be derivative of Graeco-Roman mythology. Indian myths were considered a mother of all mythologies; Old Norse and Graeco-Roman mythologies were rather regarded as her daughters and each other's sisters. While the earliest translations of Sanskrit appeared already in 1651, the process of translating and making available Indian and Iranian texts would accelerate by the end of the eighteenth century: in 1771 the *Zend-Avesta* was published in translation, in 1785 the *Bhagavadgita*, in 1788 the *Hitopadesa*, in 1789 the *Sakuntala* and in

1801–02 the *Upanishads* (Graf 1993 [1987]: 20; Böldl 2000: 187, 189). One of the founding fathers of comparative linguistics was the German Romantic, philologist and philosopher Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829), who analysed Indian mythology from a philological and historical perspective (Halink 2015: 249). In *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800), Schlegel argued that *Im Orient müssen das höchste Romantische suchen* ('the ultimate Romantic should be sought in the Orient'; quotation in Böldl 2000: 190). In 1808, Schlegel published *Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* ('Language and Wisdom of the Indians'), in which he dealt with the Indian myths on a historical and philological basis. The book consists of chapters on Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy and beliefs (on emanation, transmigration of souls, astrological superstition and nature worship), poetry and migration of peoples. The final chapter made available a translation of some Indian poetry. Schlegel also included a chapter concerning the value and purpose of Indian studies, in which he concluded that Europe and Asia should be viewed as one great family, an inseparable unity, and that the literature of all the cultivated peoples should be regarded as an ongoing interconnected development, as *ein großes Ganzes* ('a great whole') (Schlegel 1808: 217–18). Schlegel's work provided a paradigm shift in that it inspired scholars to conduct comparative studies of myth. In the first volume of his journal, *Indische Bibliothek* (1823), his own brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), supposed that Old Norse mythology originated in India and further claimed that it was possible that Óðinn was identical to Buddha (Schlegel 1823: 252–53).

Jacob Grimm (1785–1863)[1] achieved a central position in the reception of Old Norse myth because his work encapsulated nineteenth-century vernacular philology and mythology. In 1819 he published the first volume of a grammar covering the Germanic family of languages, *Deutsche Grammatik*. Sixteen years later, in 1835, he published *Deutsche Mythologie*, which, again, not only covered German but Germanic mythology in the general sense. When *Deutsche Mythologie* appeared, Jacob Grimm was already considered an authority: apart from publishing his grammar of the Germanic languages, he had also collected folk-tales and translated and edited ancient texts, such as the eddic poems and Tacitus's *Germania* (Leerssen 2016: 76). In addition to the evidence he extracted from Asian myths and his application of Indo-European linguistic methods, he included local folklore material in his investigations, based on his belief that there existed an unbroken tradition from ancient times to the present.

[1] On Jacob Grimm, see Chapters 2.1, 3.5 and 3.6 in this volume.

Buddha and Óðinn

The hypothesis that Óðinn and Buddha were identical, which had already been proposed in 1784 by Sir William Jones, quickly caught on and became accepted as mainstream knowledge in the scholarship of the first part of the nineteenth century. The showdown with the euhemeristic approach and the birth of comparative studies within the discipline of Old Norse mythology came in 1808 with the Swede Anders Andersson's *Dissertatio Historico Etymologica, de Odino Indorum* ('Historical and Etymological Dissertation about the Óðinn of the Indians'). The dissertation was submitted at the University of Lund under the supervision of Professor Johan Lundblad (1753–1820) (Lassen 2011: 46–47). It was inspired by comparative linguistics and also by Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858), who was among the scholars who considered Indian myth more ancient than Graeco-Roman myth; to him Eastern religion was the original religion (*Urreligion*). Creuzer also considered myths to be misunderstandings of symbols (Graf 1993 [1987]: 21; Halink 2015: 249). According to Andersson, before the invention of writing, primitive people had used symbols or pictures (comparable to the pictograms of the Egyptians) in order to express themselves in writing. These symbols were then applied to humans as names. Later, when the origin of the names was forgotten, the humans formed their ideas about the gods on the basis of those same names. This is, according to Andersson, the reason why there are names of gods that never existed in reality — and therefore he considered it futile to search for the historical background of Óðinn and Þórr. According to Andersson, the key to understanding Óðinn lies in the study of the myths of India, China and other Asian nations: originally Óðinn was — and this state of things had continued until Andersson's time — worshipped by the Asians under the name of Buddha. Andersson's elucidation is clearly inspired by comparative linguistics: *Both*, *Bud* or *But* of the Indians is identical to *Fo*, *Foho*, *Fohi* or *Fuhi* of the Chinese; *Pout*, *Pott*, *Poti* or *Put* of the Tibetans; *Teut*, *Theut*, *Thout* or *Thot* of the Egyptians; which is finally identical to the Scandinavian *vod*, from which the name *Vodan* derives (Andersson 1808: 6–7). Odinism is thus, according to Andersson, related to Buddhism, which Andersson terms *Samanæismus* (1808: 16).[2] Buddha is identical to Hermes, Mercury, Thot and Óðinn. They all belong to the same cult.

[2] The information about shamanism is obtained by Andersson from Sjöborg's dissertation of 1808 *Tympanum Schamanico-Lapponicum* ('The Lappish Shamanic Drum'). Here Óðinn is also identified with Buddha.

The discussion about Óðinn's identification with Buddha was continued by the poet, polyhistorian and professor at the University of Uppsala, Vilhelm Fredrik Palmblad (1788–1852) in an 1822 dissertation entitled *De Buddha et Wodan dissertatio* ('Dissertation about Buddha and Odin'). By this time the methodological framework of such a dissertation was largely developed from Indo-European linguistics. Following the linguists' conclusion that the Scandinavian languages belonged to an Indo-European language family, Palmblad considered it a matter of course that the Nordic peoples originated in Asia, exactly as *Ynglinga saga* and Snorri's *Edda* relate. Concerning the identification of Óðinn with Buddha, Palmblad reached a negative conclusion: the two are not really identical. Palmblad found (1822: 38) that the texts in which Óðinn and Buddha play a part display significant differences, and therefore he concluded that Óðinn and Buddha would not have shared any characteristics, if indeed they were correctly considered to be the historical persons that they appeared to be in their myths. Palmblad acknowledges, however, that the comparative linguists are correct in believing their names to be related and to mean 'supreme god'.

Palmblad did not put to rest the hypothesis about Óðinn's identification with Buddha. Two years later, in 1824, a response to Palmblad's dissertation appeared in the journal of the Swedish Gothic society, *Iduna*, by the Gothicist Johan Haqvin Wallman (1792–1853), *Odin och Buddha* ('Óðinn and Buddha'). According to Wallman, Óðinn's one-eyed nature symbolizes his identity as a sun-god, in contrast to Palmblad's opposition to this equation. Wallman argues further that Óðinn is in part also a psychopomp, a Nordic Mercury/Hermes (1824: 181), and (1824: 220) that the primordial form of Mercury is Buddha: *såsom solens Guddomlighet och krigsförste motsvarar* [*Odin*] *Krishna, Indiens Apollon, og åter såsom wishetens och det andliga lifwets representant Budha och Hermes* ('as the sun-god and warrior lord Óðinn corresponds to Krishna, the Apollo of India, and again as the god of wisdom and eternal life to Buddha and Hermes'). According to Wallman, Óðinn's genealogical and etymological relationship with Buddha had not only been suggested by previous scholars, it had been definitively proven.

The World Soul

Inspired by Schelling, the Jena school of Romanticists conceived of myth as the expression of a universal, all-pervading and omnipotent *Weltseele*, a World Soul. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* reached Denmark in 1802 through lectures given by Henrik Steffens (1773–1845) at Eler's Kollegium in Copenhagen. These lec-

tures were attended by N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who claimed that he did not understood much of them (see also Chapter 8.1. of Volume 1 of this study); by Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), whom Steffens inspired to compose the innovative and provocative poem *Guldhornene* ('The Golden Horns', 1802); and last but not least by Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847), who was equally enthusiastic about these ideas and 'became one of the very first Icelandic representatives of the Romantic movement' (Halink 2015: 241). Pairing pantheism with comparative linguistics, Romanticists considered local myths to be instances of an evolving organic system encompassing the entire world.

Finnur Magnússon's Eddalæren

The Icelander Finnur Magnússon (often Danicized as Finn Magnusen) was a close friend of the Danish linguist Rasmus Rask (1787–1832), who in an essay contest on the origin of Old Norse, announced by The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in 1811, proved in his contribution, which he submitted in 1814, that the Germanic languages belonged to the same language family as Greek and Latin (on Rask, see further Chapter 7.1 in Volume 1 of this study). Both Rask and Finnur Magnússon were scholars on whom the brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm depended for their studies of Old Norse (see Schmidt 1885; Halink 2015: 244). In his essay, Rask was the first to undertake a systematic evaluation of the similarities between the languages. Mythology was in vogue in academia. In the following year, 1815, the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters offered a reward for *den bedste Forklaring af de ældste kosmogoniske Myter, jevnförte med de nyere Physikeres Grundregler for Geognosien* ('the best explication of the oldest cosmogonic myths in relation to the current laws of physics regarding the earth') (Finnur Magnússon 1824–26: 1, 32). And in 1816 they announced a new contest, now asking for *Sammenhængen imellem de gamle Nordboers, især Skandinavernes og de Indisk-Persiske Nationers Religion, önskes historisk-critisk oplyst ved Sammenligning af disse Folkeslags Traditioner, Sprog og Monumenter* ('[an elucidation of] the relationship between the religion of the ancient Nordic people, especially the Scandinavians, and the Indian-Persian nations, by comparing the traditions, languages and monuments of these nations') (Finnur Magnússon 1824–26: 1, p. xvi). The annoucement of these three prize essays testifies to the contemporary importance of the question of the Indian origin of both Nordic religion and language, as well as the importance of the laws of physics and nature in the study of myth. Myths were considered allegories of natural phenomena, and comparativism was, by then, an established methodology in European academia (Halink 2015: 248).

Finnur Magnússon submitted his lengthy essay *Eddalæren* ('The Teachings of the Edda') on 31 March 1818, an expanded version of which was published in four volumes during 1824–26. The commentary on mythology had started as a series of lectures at the University of Copenhagen (Clunies Ross 2011: 55) and was submitted for the third essay contest mentioned above. The two first volumes alone represent the original prize essay (1824–26: I, pp. vi–vii). The same year, he also published a small treatise on the similarities between the Nordic religion and those of India, Persia, Asia and Africa: *Udsigt over den kaukasiske Menneskestammes ældste Hjemsted og Udvandringer* ('A Survey of the Oldest Homeland and Emigrations of the Caucasian People').

Finnur Magnússon remarked in his original *Eddalæren* of 1818 that no one in Europe at the time had full knowledge of the Indian or Persian myths, since no linguistic expert had yet travelled to Asia. But this changed with Rasmus Rask's expedition to Russia, Persia and India in the years 1818–23, as Finnur Magnússon later noted in the published version of the work (1824–26: I, pp. vi–vii). Throughout this voluminous study (cf. 1824–26: I, 140) Finnur Magnússon traces mythological figures, the Old Norse world-view and beliefs to their presumed sources in Asia: *Udspringet til Alverdens Religioner er at finde i de asiatiske Himmelbjerge* ('The source of all the religions of the entire world is to be found in the heavenly mountains of Asia'). He compares Old Norse mythology with Germanic, Persian, Jewish, Indian and Egyptian traditions and explicates mythic narratives and mythological figures as illustrations of natural phenomena. For example, Óðinn's brother Vé is considered to be a god of fire, while Vili is a god of light (1824–26: I, 354, 356).

The stated philosophical framework of *Eddalæren* is Romanticism; in the preface to the first volume, Finnur Magnússon quotes Henrik Steffens's Copenhagen lectures as his point of departure (1824–26: I, 30): *Den ældgamle orientalske mythologiske Tidsalder er Moder til den græske Mytologi; thi ikke at tale om,* ***at den orientalske torde indeholde Spiren til den nordiske*** ('the ancient Oriental mythological era is the mother of Greek mythology, not to mention, *that the Oriental holds the seed to the Nordic*'). Finnur Magnússon was clearly inspired by Steffens (who, in turn, was inspired by Schelling) in applying what he termed a 'nature-allegorical' approach:

> Det er blevet kjendt [...] *at hellige Sagn gjemme mærkværdige Fragmenter af Jordens Dannelses Historie; at mange Myther af de orientalske og nordiske Urfolk i de dybsindigste Billeder bevare Naturens Methamorphoser*; [...]. Vore förste Forfædre vare [...] Guderne nærmest af alle Mennesker, derfor synes Naturen, endskjönt paa en den nærværende Physik ubegribelig Maade, at have aabnet sit Helligste for dem, og mange af hin Tids Allegorier og Myther synes at indeholde Naturens egne höjeste Orakelsprog. (1824–26: I, 31–32)

> (It has become apparent, *that sacred legends preserve extraordinary fragments about the history of the creation of the earth; that many myths about the primeval people of the Orient and the North preserve metamorphoses of nature in the most profound imagery*; [...]. Our first ancestors were [...] of all human beings closest to the gods, therefore Nature appears to have revealed its most sacred being to them, albeit in a manner incomprehensible to current physics, and many allegories and myths of those times seem to contain Nature's highest oracular statements.)

The eddic myths are believed to preserve ancient knowledge about geology, meteorology, cosmology and astronomy. There is, according to Finnur Magnússon, a striking similarity between the results of contemporary geologists and the ancient cosmogony of the Eddas (1824–26: I, 48); the Eddas contain visualizations and personifications of natural phenomena (1824–26: I, 46–47). Mímir is considered to be the lord of the oceans who has captured Óðinn's eye, which is the sun. To primitive people, sun, moon and stars appear to emerge from the ocean. This explains why Hœnir is not capable of anything without the help of Mímir, since our ancient forefathers believed that the air would have been been dark if the heavenly bodies had not been released from the sea (1824–26: II, 238). The animals inhabiting Yggdrasill further signify the most important phenomena in nature (1824–26: II, 283); the eagle, for instance, symbolizes the atmosphere (1824–26: II, 274). The mythical world is systematically divided into nine realms: the world of light and flames, Goðheimar/Ásgarðr, Vanaheimr/Vindheimar, Mannheimar/Miðgarðr, Myrkheimar, Þrúðheimar, Bilskírnir. Goðheimar, Ásgarðr and Valhöll are situated in the starry sky. Whereas Vanaheimar, Þrúðheimar and Bilskírnir are situated in the troposphere, the mythical Ásgarðr and the residences of the gods are constellations in the sky (1825: III, 18–30). When Nordic pagans watched the starry sky, according to Finnur Magnússon, they would see the remote constellations as the castles of the Æsir and the brightest and most shining stars as the gods of Ásgarðr themselves, while the smaller stars were *einherjar*, the legions of the sky. When Óðinn sent his valkyries forth on their winged horses, they appeared to earthly heroes as shining meteors, the Northern Lights and fireballs (1824–26: III, 19).

The further one delves into the Asian system of myths, Finnur Magnússon remarks, the more one finds parallels to Nordic myths (1824–26: I, 57). The roots of the cosmic tree, Yggdrasill, can also be traced to Asia, to the Persian cosmic tree, Albordj (1824–26: I, 116). Both trees are placed in the middle of the world and next to a lake, which borders the underworld, and both stand close to a heavenly wellspring. The primeval cow Auðhumbla and the myth of the creation of the world, to name two instances, also have parallels in Indian,

Figure 3.3.1 (opposite): Finnur Magnússon, 'De ni verdener', in *Eddalæren og dens oprindelse* (1824–26: III, 353). Photo courtesy of Landsbókasafn Íslands, Háskólabókasafn. The final pages of the third volume of *Eddalæren* contained three illustrations of Finnur Magnússon's hypotheses. The one above (which is the second of the three) provides a systematic visualization of the nine worlds of Old Norse mythology, according to Finnur Magnússon.[3]

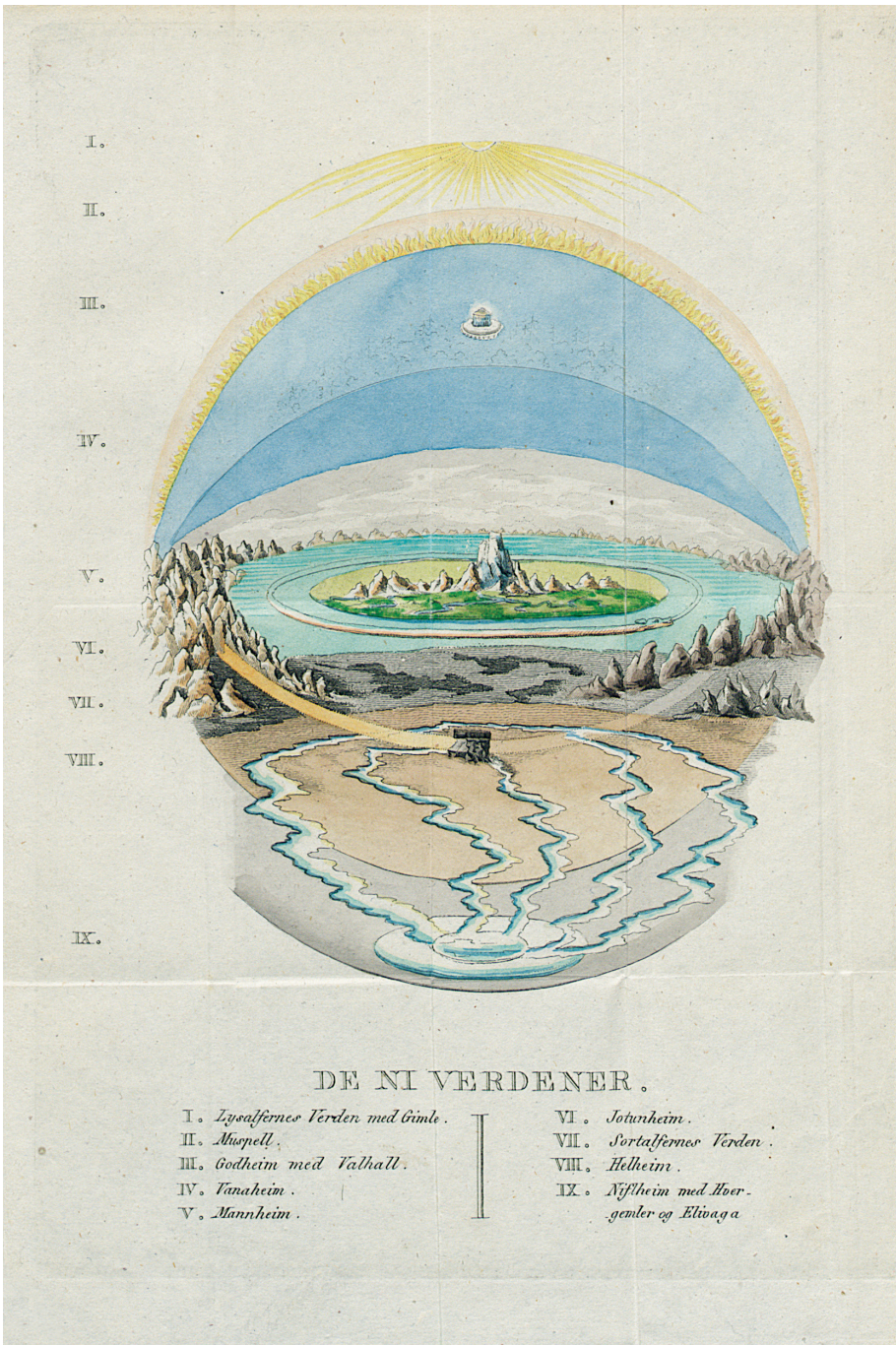
Persian and Buddhist myths (1824–26: I, 118, 258–64). In the fourth and final volume of *Eddalæren*, Finnur Magnússon states his hope that with this work he had proven the words of the 'immortal Herder': *Der Keim der Edda ist aus Asien her* (1824–26: IV, vi).

The analyses and hypotheses in *Eddalæren* are frequently inspired by current Romantic philosophical notions. An example is Finnur Magnússon's analysis of Óðinn: Óðinn and Jupiter were originally worshipped as the gods of heaven, as the supreme divinities of our world (1824–26: I, 345). On the basis of etymology, Finnur Magnússon argues that Óðinn was no less than *Verdens Aand* ('the World's Soul') (1824–26: I, 338). Óðinn's name is related to the German words *Odem*, *Athem* (Danish *Aande*, *Aand*) ('breath, spirit'). Finnur speculates that the name 'Óðinn' or 'Vódin' is derived from *vada* ('wade, walk'): *den gamle Bemærkning* [...] *gaaer ud paa en Fart som Vindens* [...]. *Deraf kommer også æda* [...] *fare heftigt frem* ('whose ancient meaning signifies a speed like the wind [...]. *Æða* [...] 'race fiercely' is also derived from this') ((1824–26: I, 335–36)):

> Men Navnet *Odin* er desuden i intellektuel Henseende beslægtet med det oldnordiske *Odur*, Fornuft, Sind (senere ogsaa *Poesie*), da man ansaa Digtergaven for Kjendetegn paa den störste Forstand. Guddommen *Odin* er i Edda *Himlens* og *Verdens Aand*, der og besidder den höjeste *Forstand*. [...] De samme Begreber gjöre Öst-Asiaterne sig om deres *Buddhah* [...]. (1824–26: I, 337–38)

> (But cognitively the name of *Odin* is also related to Old Norse *Odur*, reason, mind (later also *Poetry*), since poetic talent was considered to be a sign of the greatest wisdom. In Edda the deity *Odin* is *the spirit of heaven and the world*, who also possesses the highest *wisdom*. [...] The East-Asians have the same conceptions about their *Buddhah* [...].)

[3] On these illustrations, see further Clunies Ross 2011. The illustrations have been inserted and bound into different volumes of the existing copies of Finnur Magnússon's *Eddalæren*. In the copies kept at the National Library of Iceland and the Royal Library in Copenhagen, the illustrations are placed at the back of the third volume. In the copy in Iceland, the illustrations are watercoloured, in Copenhagen they are printed in black and white. In the copy to which Margaret Clunies Ross had access in the British Library, the illustrations were bound into the endpapers of Volume IV (Clunies Ross 2011: 56).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I. Lysalfernes Verden med Gimle.
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IV. Vanaheim.
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VIII. Helheim.
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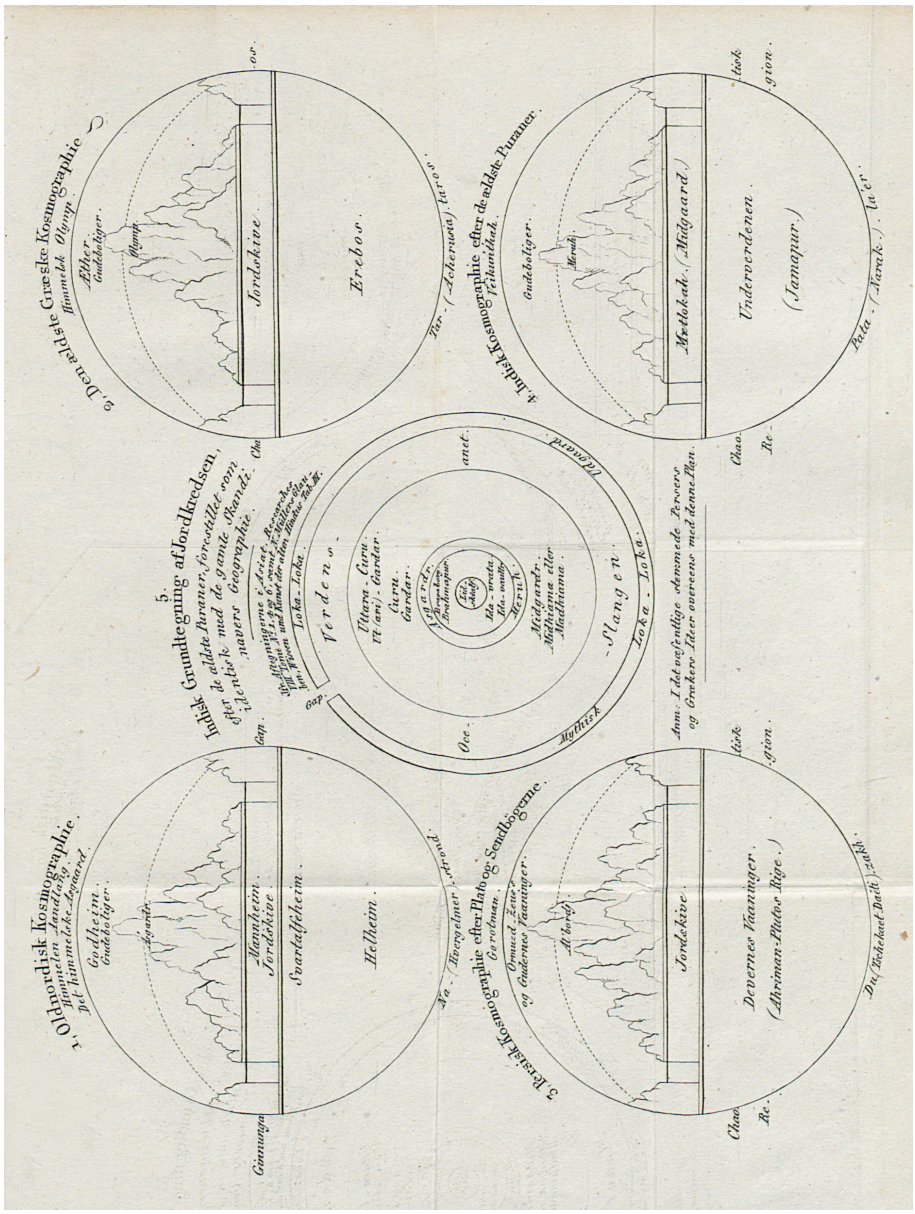

Figure 3.3.2: Finnur Magnússon, Comparative cosmological diagrams, *Eddalæren og dens oprindelse* (1824–26: III, 355). Photo courtesy of Landsbókasafn Íslands, Háskólabókasafn. The last of the three figures in the third volume of *Eddalæren* shows a cross-section of the ancient cosmography of Old Norse mythology next to that of the Persians, Indians and Greeks, pointing out their similarities.

Finnur Magnússon suggested that the conception of an all-pervading World Soul forms the basis of *Himmel- og Luft-Guden Zeus's Navn og Væsen* ('the name and nature of the heaven- and air-god Jupiter') (1824–26: I, 344), and he also found links between Óðinn, Vishnu and Buddha. Accordingly, the varying names were different expressions for the same mythic deity (Finnur Magnússon 1824–26: I, 121–22; Lassen 2011: 50; Halink 2015: 250). As Halink has pointed out (2015: 252), by 'applying the Romantic concept of the omnipotent *Weltseele*, Finnur was able to "reverse" Snorri's theory, and explain euhemerism as a result of the lack of understanding of reincarnation and metamorphosis in medieval Christendom'. Buddhism is, according to Finnur Magnússon, related to shamanism, which was reputedly the belief of the earliest inhabitants of Scandinavia; shamanism, in like manner, was perhaps the 'mother of Buddhism' (1824–26: I, 137).

Before the Runamo-scandal,[4] Finnur Magnússon was considered internationally as an authority on Old Norse literature and mythology. His comprehensive and comparative work on Old Norse myths was seminal and influenced scholars and students widely. This may be exemplified by the fame of one of the three figures included in the *Eddalæren*, that is, Finnur Magnússon's visualization of Yggdrasill. Ever since the illustration of the Yggdrasill was reprinted by I. A. Blackwell in his 1847 edition of Thomas Percy's (1729–1811) *Northern Antiquities*, a translation of Paul-Henri Mallet's *Monumens de la Mythologie et de la Poésie des Celtes et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves*, which first appeared in 1770, it has become a standard depiction of the mythological world (Clunies Ross 2011: 63–64). Through his illustration, 'Finnur had a great and long-lasting influence upon Norse cosmological scholarship, and especially upon more popular understandings of the subject', as formulated by Clunies Ross (2011: 56, 69).[5] The illustration of the nine worlds did not, however, have any prolonged influence on scholarship or popular reception of mythology (Clunies Ross 2011: 63–64).

The new comparative mythology of the early nineteenth century, with its quest for origins and focus on nature, continued to influence the academic field throughout the century. A decade later than Finnur Magnússon, in his *Deutsche Mythologie*, Jacob Grimm (1953 [1835]: 109) followed the same etymology and line of thought in his interpretation of the most important god

[4] See Chapter 10.2 in this volume.

[5] Finnur Magnússon's image of Yggdrasill is reproduced in Chapter 6.2.5 of Volume I of this study, as Figure 6.2.5.6.

of the Nordic pantheon, Óðinn, as an expression of the World Soul: ***Wuotan***, ***Óðinn*** [*scheint*] *das allmächtige, alldurchdringende wesen, qui omnia permeat* ('*Wuotan*, *Óðinn* [appears] as the all-powerful, all-penetrating being, that permeates everything'). Unlike Finnur Magnússon, who interpreted Óðinn as a personification of the wind, it was Jacob Grimm's rather unoriginal understanding that he was a personification of the sun, 'the seeing eye of the sky'.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century the prime proponents of Indo-European proto-mythology and a natural interpretation of myth were Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) and Adalbert Kuhn (1812–81). Kuhn, a philologist, also applied folkloric approaches in his study of myth in the manner of Jacob Grimm. In 1845 he claimed to have discovered Indian and English (folkloric) parallels to Óðinn and argued that this figure was originally a god not only of Spring but of time itself and the shifting seasons (Kuhn 1845: 493–94). To Max Müller, who was a Sanskrit philologist, myths from across the world were allegorical tales of the sun (Nordberg 2013: 124). In the 1840s Max Müller attended lectures in Berlin given by Friedrich von Schelling. There he had access to Sanskrit manuscripts and began translating passages of the *Upanishads* for Schelling. When Max Müller realised the potential of the Rigveda he moved to London, where the neccesary texts were kept at the library of the British East India Company (Müller 1901: 182), and later to Oxford. Here, at the University of Oxford, in 1868, he was appointed to a new Chair of Comparative Philology, a position created especially for him. He edited a fifty-volume translation of Asian mythological writings, *The Sacred Books of the East*, which was published by Oxford University Press between 1879 and 1910.

It was not until the first half of the twentieth century, when Georges Dumézil with his focus on common social structures revolutionized the field of Indo-European comparative mythology, that comparative mythologists would turn away from the idea that all myths were to be understood as ways of comprehending and explaining natural phenomena.[6] In *Les Dieux des Germains* (1959), Dumézil argued that Indo-European society was divided into three social classes or 'functions' (rulers and priests, warriors and farmers). Týr and Óðinn were gods of the first function, Þórr of the second, while the Vanir were gods of the third function. Today the hypotheses of the comparative mythologists of the early nineteenth century survive mainly in the popular reception of Old Norse mythology. There '[t]he New Mythology of the 1830s [...] remains

[6] See Chapter 10.3 in this volume. Cf. also the critique of natural mythology uttered by Jan de Vries (1951).

completely dominant: in fantasy literature, in computer games, in TV series. It was the New Mythology [...], which provided the orcs and trolls, the elves and dwarves and dragons and werewolves which now crowd the shelves of every bookstore' (Shippey 2005: 1–2). Nevertheless, the tradition of the comparative search for Indo-European origins persists in academia to this day within certain fields. In 2000, Kris Kershaw published *The One-Eyed God: Odin and the (Indo-)Germanic Männerbünde*, in which, by means of applying comparative Indo-European etymologies and drawing parallels with pre-Vedic India, Vishna, and Mitra, she argues that Óðinn was originally an incarnation of the leader of the warbands (2000: 74), and that the conception of Óðinn as a one-eyed god derives from a misconceived ritual among pre-Vedic *Männerbünde* (2000: 274; cf. Lassen 2011: 67). It is Kershaw's stated intention to bridge the gap between 'Iceland and the India of the Vratyas [...] an expanse of some 3000 years and 7000 km' (2000: 9). The roots of her study, which is not unique in today's academia, may be traced directly to the comparative study of religion in the nineteenth century.

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3.4 – The Comparative study of Celtic and Nordic Religions

Bernhard Maier

The comparative study of (North) Germanic and Celtic myths, rituals, religious ideas and religious customs may be regarded as a special domain within the comparative study of Old Norse religion in general. It is characterized by a combination of at least three special features, which (as a set) are not readily encountered elsewhere and have significantly shaped the ongoing scholarly debate in this field. First, there is the fact that both 'Celtic' and 'Germanic' are terms that are rooted in classical ethnography, but have come to be invested with a substantially different (and much wider) meaning in modern scholarship. This modern meaning has been conditioned by the assumptions and presuppositions of successive generations of linguists, philologists, archaeologists and historians, some of which have come to be questioned in recent decades. Second, both 'Celtic' and 'Germanic' (in the modern meaning of these terms) may refer to cultural traits that are attested over a period of more than two thousand years. Thus many parallels and similarities that have been observed may be explained in different ways — as a reflection of common origins (possibly involving other Indo-European traditions as well), as results of borrowing or diffusion due to prolonged historical contacts, as convergent developments based on similar social and economic conditions and — last but

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The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume II: From c. 1830 to the Present, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 95–100
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.115698

not least — as sheer coincidence, the putative parallels reflecting a selective perception on the part of the modern scholar rather than any intrinsic similarity. Third and finally, it is worth recalling that both 'Celtic' and 'Germanic' have for a long time been watchwords in the context of modern nationalisms, their usurpation in cultural politics and polemics both reflecting and influencing their use in scholarly discussions. An overall history of Celtic-Germanic comparative studies in the field of religion remains to be written, but they are touched upon in general surveys of the history of scholarship, and there are two recent surveys of theories discussing the Gaelic influence in Iceland (Gísli Sigurðsson 2000) and the Celtic influences in Germanic religion in general (Egeler 2013).

The comparison or rather juxtaposition of 'Celtic' and 'Germanic' religions may be said to have begun in the seventeenth century with such works as *Germania Antiqua* (1616) by Philipp Clüver (1580–1622) and *De diis Germanis* (1648) by Elias Schedius (1615–41). Neither of these two authors made a clear-cut distinction between 'Celts' and 'Germans', nor did such eighteenth-century scholars as Johann Georg Keyssler (1693–1743) in *Antiquitates selectae Septentrionales et Celticae* (1720), Simon Pelloutier (1694–1757) in *Histoire des Celtes et particulièrement des Gaulois et des Germains* (1740) and Paul Henri Mallet (1730–1807) in *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poesie des Celtes et particulierement des anciens Scandinaves* (1756). The first author to compare and contrast rather than merely juxtapose the religions of the Celts and the Germans was Thomas Percy (1729–1811), whose translation of Mallet's work into English, *Northern Antiquities* (Mallet 1770), contained a translator's preface subtitled, 'Proofs that the Teutonic and Celtic Nations were ab origine two distinct people [*sic*]' (Mallet 17700: I, pp. i–xlviii). Likewise, Amos Simon Cottle (1766–1800), following Percy, prefixed his *Icelandic Poetry, or, The Edda of Saemund* (1797) with an introduction delineating the religious differences between Celts and Germans (Cottle 1797: iii–xi). In Germany, however, several authors continued to ignore this distinction, Jacob Schimmelmann (1712–78) taking the Eddic poems to reflect the most ancient religion of both Celts and Germans in *Die isländische Edda* (1777). In any case, comparisons between individual items were frequently marred by an insufficient knowledge of historical linguistics, so that some parallels later turned out to be spurious, while others stood the test of time better, but could not be interpreted correctly until much later. Thus Rasmus Nyerup (1759–1829) erroneously compared Old Norse *Áss* 'god, deity' and Gaulish *Esus*, another theonym, while in the case of Old Norse *Þórr* and Gaulish *Taranis* he had to be content with assuming the plausibility of some kind of connection (Nyerup 1816: 105).

More fruitful comparisons between individual elements of 'Celtic' and Old Norse religions began to be made in the second half of the nineteenth cen-

tury, after the establishment of Indo-European, Celtic and Germanic studies had substantially expanded the range of texts that could be used as evidence, provided the means of dating both whole texts and individual lexical items, and gradually supplied the methodological principles on which genuine and spurious etymological parallels could be distinguished. What lagged behind this progress in philology, however, was the general state of knowledge about the pre-Christian religions of Celts and Germans, which was still largely based on a loose combination of terse statements by Greek and Roman writers, imaginative medieval Christian reconstructions of the pagan past and inferences drawn from either the literary records of ancient Mediterranean religions or the observation of 'modern savages'. What also remained deficient was the methodology of comparison, which was unequivocal in the field of philology, but continued to be rather murky in that of religion, different interpretations of the evidence often reflecting unstated presuppositions and personal preferences rather than an unbiased weighing of arguments based on generally agreed principles. In particular, many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century notions of what was typically Celtic or typically Germanic were based on a highly selective perception and idiosyncratic interpretation of the evidence, the stolid, but solid Teuton being opposed to the imaginative, but ultimately inefficient Celt (cf., e.g., Sars 1873: 166; Mogk 1896: 8–9), an opposition first propagated and popularized by Ernest Renan (1823–92) and Matthew Arnold (1822–88), whose knowledge of the Celtic and Scandinavian literatures was sketchy and secondhand (see Galand 1959; Bromwich 1965). Moreover, some comparative studies focused on apparent similarities without paying sufficient attention to the chronology and the archaeological context of the phenomena involved (see, e.g., Görman 1987 and 1990; cf. Egeler 2013: 13). In recent decades, much progress has been made as unreflecting theorizing on the nature of ancient religions and the reliability of classical and medieval literary sources has come to be increasingly questioned, while archaeology finally began to make an ever-increasing impact on our general picture of ancient European religions. Nevertheless, the methodological problems intrinsic to any comparison of religious myths, rituals, customs and ideas have remained largely unsolved, so that a brief survey of such comparative studies has to take the form of a thematic inventory rather than that of a meaningful history.

Starting from the Old Norse side of the evidence, comparative studies of individual deities known by name have tended to focus on those gods that were assumed to be of Indo-European origin and thus could be expected to have an equivalent among the Celts. Thus Þórr and Óðinn were repeatedly compared with the Continental gods Taranis and Lugus, parallel features being assumed

to reflect either a common Indo-European inheritance or an ancient influence of the Continental Celts on neighbouring Germanic-speaking peoples (Egeler 2013: 45–50, 90–96). Moreover, there were comparisons based on the assumption that certain types of deities, exhibiting similar features or characteristics, were common to both ancient Scandinavians and Celts, because they reflected a common Indo-European origin (for comparative studies of the Germanic and Celtic Matres as representatives of ancient European mother-goddesses, see the contributions in Bauchhenss and Neumann 1987). Only rarely have such comparative studies extended to the field of mythology, based on the assumption that medieval Old Norse and Insular Celtic texts might reflect literary repercussions of Indo-European myths. Perhaps most famously, the Old Norse tradition of the war between Æsir and Vanir was compared with the Irish story of the Second Battle of Mag Tuired, both texts being assumed to reflect a survival from Indo-European mythology — an assumption which has recently been called into question (Gray 1980–81 and 1982–83; Carey 1989–90). Somewhat more frequently, Old Norse and Celtic religious concepts and ideas were juxtaposed, assuming that similarities between them might also be due to a common Indo-European origin (for a comparative study of the Germanic and Celtic religious vocabularies, see Meid 1992; Polomé 1994; Rübekeil 2002). Significantly, such comparisons often extended to other Indo-European traditions but hardly ever included material from the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, some scholars have also envisaged the possibility that what had been taken to represent an Indo-European tradition might in fact be correlated with ancient Near Eastern evidence, reflecting the spread of the Neolithic Revolution rather than that of the Indo-European languages. Examples of this kind of reasoning are comparative studies of the concept of truth, of the Merovingian origin legend, of the island of Nerthus, as mentioned by Tacitus, and of the valkyries, which all have both Indo-European and ancient Mediterranean or Near Eastern parallels (Wagner 1970; Maier 1999; Maier 2001; Egeler 2011).

If religious beliefs stretching back to the Neolithic or Indo-European periods could be assumed to be reflected in other parallels further afield, specific similarities that were confined to the Celtic and Germanic traditions sometimes invited an alternative explanation: namely, that they were due to diffusion, individual elements having developed and subsequently migrated in one direction or another, either in the pre-Roman Iron Age or during the Roman Imperial Period. This gave rise to comparative studies of weapon sacrifices (Egeler 2013: 22–27) and of the berserk motif (van Zanten 2007). Due to the comparatively early Christianization of the Roman Empire and the Insular Celts, the transfer of pagan religious ideas can hardly have continued beyond

the Age of Migrations. Nevertheless, the exchange of legends and stories that were stripped of any pagan religious significance that had formerly attached to them continued to be possible for many centuries after the demise of paganism. For this reason, parallel literary motifs which have mythological associations in either Celtic or Germanic traditions do not necessarily imply the existence of parallel myths, but merely the exchange of oral traditions, some of which may once have been rooted in (if not merely paralleled by) pagan mythology. The problems involved were debated at length in connection with the Útgarða-Loki episode in the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (*c.* 1225), for which there are significant Celtic antecedents (von Sydow 1910; Power 1985; Chesnutt 1989; Lindow 2000; Egeler 2013: 33–43).

Looking back on these attempts to correlate what we know of the pre-Christian 'Celtic' and Scandinavian religions, it is obvious that much of it is bound to remain speculative, as our knowledge of the pre-Christian religions of ancient Europe in general is in many respects incomplete and uncertain. In many cases, the significance of putative parallels and similarities between 'Celtic' and Scandinavian traditions will remain disputed, as there is no sound methodological basis to support the distinction between common inheritance, (pre)historical diffusion and sheer coincidence. Moreover, as so much of what we assume to know about the pre-Christian religions of both Insular Celts and Scandinavians is based on inferences drawn from late literary sources, it cannot be ruled out that parallels and similarities which are confined to the field of medieval literature are indicative of late literary contacts rather than early religious connections.

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3.5 – Nordic, Germanic, German: Jacob Grimm and the German Appropriation of Old Norse Religion and Myth

Simon Halink

In the course of the nineteenth century, scholars throughout Europe became increasingly obsessed with their nations' most ancient past. As a result of the political turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15) and the traumatic experience of foreign (French) oppression, a fixation on everything 'authentic', 'primordial' and 'national' took hold of the hearts and minds of Romantic idealists. Anti-French sentiments and the call for national unity dovetailed — especially in the scattered and politically divided German lands — with an intensified 'cultivation of national culture' (Leerssen 2006), entailing the canonization of 'national literature' and purging the 'national language' of foreign influences. Language was considered by many the most direct and tangible expression of the *Volksgeist* ('national spirit'), and its contamination led patriotic intellectuals to despair. The Danish philologist and historian Niels Matthias Petersen was one of them (Petersen 1863: 1): *Hvad det er for et fattigst sprog, vort kære modersmål, og hvor forlegne vi ere for ord, når der skal tales om noget, som der er en smule gejst i! Overalt have vi ladet det fremmede fortrænge vort eget; det er vor skødesynd* ('What a poor language this is, our dear native language, and how lost we are for words when it comes to talking about things with some spirit in them! Everywhere we have allowed the foreign to displace our own; that is our sin'). However, whenever *one* link with the primordial past seemed lost beyond

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salvation, there was always that *other* pristine expression of the national spirit that nationalists could turn to, in order to strengthen their claims of cultural authenticity: *Nordisk mythologi! hvilken forbindelse! fortil nordisk og bagtil græsk* ('Nordic mythology! what a connection! Nordic to the forefront and Greek to the back') (Petersen 1863: 1). How did a heathen belief system, only fragmentarily transmitted, distorted and suppressed by the Christian Church for ages, suddenly acquire that prestigious status of 'national heritage' in the course of the nineteenth century? Where did the idea of national mythologies originate, and how did it come to affect the national sentiments of scholarly and cultural thinkers from Estonia to Norway and Britain?

Undoubtedly the most significant publication to establish mythology as a category of national importance was Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* ('German Mythology'), first published in Göttingen in 1835. The influence of this work, which has been referred to as 'seminal, and largely unsurpassed' (Hall 2007: 12), can hardly be overestimated; everywhere in Europe scholars were following Grimm's lead and applying his template of mythology in order to 'reconstruct' (or in many cases 'forge') national mythologies of their own. This 'New Mythology of the 1830s' (Shippey 2005: 1), instigated by the ideas contained in *Deutsche Mythologie*, did not evolve in an ideological vacuum and must be embedded in the academic, cultural and political circumstances of the age in order to be fully understood. The following contribution will introduce the reader to the genesis of this work, its relation to other writings of the brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm and to the most revolutionary and influential theories contained therein. It will chart the editorial history and geographical distribution of the book and provide an overview of the critical reception and imitation of Grimm's methods both in Germany and beyond. In particular, it will focus on the implicit ideological assumptions lurking between the lines of *Deutsche Mythologie*, which entailed the Germanification of Nordic heritage and literature as well as the construction of a profoundly Germanic German national identity. How was this appropriative stance received by Scandinavian scholars? And how did it contribute to the national cultivation of Old Norse mythology in Europe?

A New Philology

Jacob (1785–1863) and his younger brother Wilhelm (1786–1859) Grimm hailed from a middle-class family of officials based in the town of Kassel, in the former principality of Hessen-Cassel. The brothers saw their prospect of a successful future seriously jeopardized when their father died, but an aunt with

connections at court stood up for them and enabled Jacob to enrol in the law department of the University of Marburg in 1802. In the course of his studies he was influenced by the lectures of the legal historian Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779–1861) who in 1805 took Jacob with him to Paris to serve as his assistant. His love for ancient manuscripts, old German literature as well as his aversion to French culture and Napoleon's far-reaching reforms in the German lands would have a formative effect on the young Jacob. Savigny also introduced both brothers to the so-called Bökendorf Circle, which used to convene at the Bökendorf estate of the Haxthausen family and was dedicated to the collection of folk-songs. In this social milieu, Savigny's academic historicism and Germanophilia dovetailed with an appetite for folk-songs and folklore, and instilled in the Grimms a passion for German philology and linguistics (Leerssen 2010).

The first fruits of this lifelong fascination were a collection of fairy-tales and popular stories called *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–15). This collection was soon followed by the influential *Deutsche Sagen* (1816–18), and together these two early collections were to determine the course of oral literature and folklore studies throughout Europe (Gunnell 2012). But the brothers also published separately from each other, and in 1819 Jacob established his reputation as a linguist with the publication of the first volume of his *Deutsche Grammatik*. This study revolutionized the field of language studies, and its impact on the Humanities has been compared to that of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) on the life sciences (Shippey 2005: 6). This comparison is fitting on more than a superficial level: both works introduced an *evolutionary* perspective to their respective fields of research, supported by an innovative methodology based on the principle of *comparison*. And, just like Darwin, Grimm[1] produced an exhaustive body of evidence and examples from a wide range of sources in order to strengthen his claims.[2] The field of comparative philology, which concerns itself with the historical relatedness of different languages, and with the reconstruction of the presupposed, long-lost proto-languages — or *Ursprachen* —

[1] Henceforth, I will refer to Jacob Grimm simply as Grimm, and to his brother as Wilhelm Grimm.

[2] According to Tom Shippey, both scholars undermined one specific biblical myth with their respective theories of evolution: Darwin dealt a heavy blow to the literal interpretation of the story of creation and Noah's Ark as recounted in the Book of Genesis, whereas Grimm's *Grammatik* arguably vanquished the story of the Tower of Babel (Shippey 2005: 6). On the significance of the latter for theories of the origin of the pre-Christian religions of the North, see Volume 1, Chapter 2.1.2.

from which they derived, was already firmly established by the time Grimm published this *magnum opus*. Already in the sixteenth century, merchants and Jesuit missionaries to the East had noticed extraordinary similarities between the languages of India — especially Sanskrit, India's 'classical' language — and the languages of Europe (Auroux 2000: 1156). This suspicion of relatedness evolved into a scholarly theory in the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, primarily in the pioneering works of Sir William Jones, Thomas Young and the German linguist Franz Bopp (on these developments and the pioneering work of Rasmus Rask, see Volume 1, Chapter 7.1). However, a treatise as systematic and exhaustive as the one produced by Grimm had not yet been published, and the rhetorical strength it supplied to the Indo-Germanic theory as a whole would prove critical for bringing about a paradigm shift in the Humanities.

Arguably the most profound effect of Grimm's taxonomical perspective on language lies in the implication that no language stands on its own, and that it can only be understood when embedded in its historical, Indo-European 'context' (*Zusammenhang*). Therefore, the *Deutsche Grammatik* is not so much a study of the *German* language — as the title would suggest — but rather of the German*ic* languages, including the extinct variants of Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, Old High German and Gothic — among others. This holistic approach enabled Grimm to demonstrate how all modern Germanic languages had evolved from a single *Ursprache*, and grown increasingly further apart from one another to the point of mutual incomprehensibility in the course of many centuries and multiple 'sound-shifts' (*Lautverschiebungen*). According to 'Grimm's law', these very structural and logical sound-shifts account — much like a linguistic variation of Darwin's genetic mutations — for the gradual evolution of languages, and a regressive analysis of these shifts could eventually lead the diligent scholar to a defendable reconstruction of extinct root-languages.

For the purposes of the present study, the linguistic intricacies of Grimm's new philology will not concern us any further. The holistic approach applied to the study of language had consequences for other branches of the Humanities as well, not least for the study of folk-tales, legends and myths. Like the extinct Germanic root-language, root-versions of ancient narratives were considered to have made their way through Europe and given rise to local variations of the same story — for example, the *Nibelungenlied* in Germany and *Völsunga saga* in Scandinavia — evolving into separate bodies of narrative. Elaborating on the linguistic assumptions of his brother, Wilhelm Grimm proposed that all surviving fragments of heroic legend (*Heldensage*) could be traced back to an original root-version, one single legend, from which all the local expres-

sions had evolved. By presenting popular narratives as an organic entity, something which evolves and develops according to certain laws and independent from the creative intentions of individuals — just like languages — legends could be interpreted as *natural* expressions of a people (*Volk*), or a collective national spirit (*Volksgeist*): according to Wilhelm Grimm, these stories had *aus der Mitte des ganzen Volkes hervorgegangen* ('emerged from the bosom of the entire nation') (W. Grimm 1829: 368) as the products of a poetic national spirit. On the basis of scientific methodology, ancient 'authorless' narratives became organic expressions of nationhood and sublime mouthpieces of national character; a role they would play with verve in the ensuing age of European nationalisms.

It was not Wilhelm but Jacob Grimm who would produce the most influential elaboration of the ramifications of his new philology for the study of ancient narratives. As in the case of the Indo-European language family, the existence of an Indo-European myth family — or an *eurasische Mythenbaum* ('Eurasian myth-tree') (Böldl 2000: 210) — had already been established before Grimm turned his attention to it. Georg Friedrich Creuzer's claim that all the world's mythologies and religions had originated from one single primeval world-view, or *Urreligion*, had already inspired scholars to travel down the family tree of religion towards its very roots, in order to uncover the 'original version' (*Urfassung*) of all mythology (Creuzer 1810). The brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich von Schlegel, two towering figures of German Romantic philosophy, were great enthusiasts for Sanskrit literature and religion, and noted many striking similarities between the figures of Buddha and Odin (Schlegel 1820: 25–30; Lassen 2011: 44 and Chapter 3.3 above). The tantalizing link between occidental and Oriental mythology aroused some of the greatest academic minds of the early nineteenth century, and was believed to hold the key to unlocking the unsolved mysteries of obscure eddic poetry (Halink 2015: 249). However, no treatise on the topic of comparative mythology would surpass Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835, 2nd edn 1844, 3rd edn 1854) in sheer magnitude, erudition and influence. In terms of methodology and theoretical presuppositions, the *Deutsche Mythologie* (*DM*) is clearly indebted to the *Grammatik*, which had appeared some sixteen years earlier. Much of Grimm's paradigmatic approach to language, which had established his academic reputation and rendered him a living legend, is simply transposed to the realm of mythology in an attempt to repeat his earlier triumphs in the field of linguistics. After the model of his revolutionary 'new philology', a 'new mythology' was to evolve from his views on Germanic myth (Shippey 2005).

A New Mythology

Jacob Grimm started working on his mythological magnum opus in 1832, some three years after he moved to the university town of Göttingen where he accepted a position as professor and librarian. Wilhelm came with him and was appointed under-librarian. When browsing through the first edition of *DM*, it is hard to believe that Grimm could have found the time to create this vast 'Grimmian myth-universe' (*Grimm'sche Mythenuniversum*, Heizmann 2013: 00:12:30[3]) in all its profundity, its monumental proportions and meticulous system in addition to his obligations as professor and librarian. In the course of only a few years, Grimm achieved in his *DM* what — according to Fritz Paul (1985) — would have taken an ordinary scholar at least two academic lifetimes: one to collect all the material, and the other to analyse and structure it. By then both brothers had already been captivated by the topic of Nordic mythology for a considerable time: Wilhelm had published his *Altdänische Heldenlieder, Balladen und Märchen* ('Old Danish Heroic Songs, Ballads and Fairy Tales') more than twenty years earlier in 1811, and in 1815 they had jointly published their own collection of lays from the Poetic Edda, the *Lieder der alten Edda* ('Lays of the Old Edda'). But none of these earlier publications can rival *DM* in terms of thematic extensiveness and theoretical profundity.

Deutsche Mythologie consists of thirty-eight individual chapters, divided into four thematic clusters: the gods and their cults, opening with a chapter on 'God' in the monotheistic sense, to which we will return later; humans — heroes and wise women — as well as non-human creatures; Germanic cosmogony (creation narratives) and cosmology; and finally Germanic beliefs and superstition (*Aberglaube*). Tantalizingly absent in this thematic structure is the whole concept of eschatology, or world-ending, which nonetheless constitutes a crucial element in Nordic mythology. Since Grimm must have been aware of possibly similar motifs in Old High German texts — the etymological link between the title of the ninth-century poem *Muspilli* and the Old Norse concept of *Muspell* or *Muspellsheimr* is still a matter of debate — it is not likely that he discarded Ragnarök because he deemed it too 'Scandinavian', and hence not 'German' enough. It is more likely that he regarded these eschatological narratives as later, Christian interpolations, and thus not appropriate material for an

[3] This is a reference to the recorded version of this lecture, accessible on Youtube. The numbers refer to the segment of the video I am referring to, indicating the hour, minute and second respectively.

attempted reconstruction of the pre-Christian faith.[4] During Grimm's lifetime, *DM* underwent three editions (1835, 1844 and 1854), the third one being an unaltered reprint of the expanded second edition in two volumes. Twelve years after Grimm's death in 1863, his pupil Elard Hugo Meyer curated an even further expanded fourth edition, now in three volumes, which appeared over the course of four years (1875–78).[5] The impact of the work reached well beyond the borders of the German-speaking world, and it was soon translated into many different languages.

Just as the *Deutsche Grammatik* encompasses considerably more than the German language alone, so the *DM* constitutes far more than a scholarly rendition of mythological narratives from Germany. Such a rendition would not even be feasible, Grimm maintains (Grimm 1844: viii), since *auf uns ist keine edda gebracht worden und kein einziger schriftsteller unsrer vorzeit hat es versucht die überreste des heidnischen glaubens zu sammeln* ('no Edda has been brought down to us and not one author from our ancient past has attempted to collect the remnants of our heathen faith'). Even those early medieval scholars to whom much of the ancient lore would still have been available refused to write about the matter and *wurde in römischer Schule bald den erinnerungen des vaterlandes abgewandt und trachtete die letzten eindrücke des verhassten heidenthums zu tilgen statt zu bewahren* ('were turned away in the Roman school from the memories of the fatherland, and taught to destroy rather than preserve the last impressions of the despised pagan faith') (idem). Whereas in his *Grammatik* Grimm attempted to elucidate the evolutionary history of a still existing object (the Germanic languages), he then sought to reconstruct something which was lost (German mythology) through the study and comparison of other, better preserved Indo-European mythologies. The underlying assumption was that, just like all languages in the same family derived from one primeval *Ursprache*, all mythologies were bound together in a genealogical web beginning with a singular *Urmythos*.

What sets *DM* apart from earlier attempts to systematize and reconstruct the pre-Christian world-views of the Germanic peoples is that Grimm did not restrict himself to stories about gods, but 'examined the totality of Germanic religious experience, from the creation narratives of the *Prose Edda* to the super-

[4] Nevertheless, Grimm *does* refer to Ragnarök as proof of the gods' powerlessness against the forces of fate (Grimm 1844: 816), which would indicate that the author did attach at least some credibility to the narrative's pagan origin.

[5] The third volume contains supplements and appendices (*Nachträge und Anhang*) from Grimm's writings.

stitions of the German peasant' (Williamson 2004: 104). Understandably, the variety of sources required to achieve this ambitious goal is virtually endless, and Grimm's exhaustive accumulation of minute references and obscure details has become notorious. The design of *DM* is encyclopaedic, and the chapters deal with the poetic, historical, archaeological, philological, folkloristic and (comparative) mythological aspects of this broad subject. In his effort to demonstrate the unity or *Zusammenhang* of all the Germanic mythologies, the entries link West Germanic 'variations' of gods and concepts to their North Germanic 'counterparts', creating the impression that, for instance, Wotan and Óðinn are, in essence, one and the same deity.[6] Etymology and linguistics form an integral part of this mythography, since language and world-view were — as expressions of the national spirit — closely related in Grimm's mind, meaning that the study of one of them could lead to new insights into the other. The development of both language and belief-systems was, according to him, characterized by historical continuity, meaning that from relatively late or even modern (folkloristic) sources, trustworthy information on much older strata of mythology and religion could be deduced. This emphasis on the direct historical link between contemporary rural culture and an 'authentic', pre-Christian heritage would come to play a crucial role in the imagination of Romantic nationalists throughout Europe (Leerssen 2012).

In the preface (*Vorrede*) to the second edition of *DM* (1844), Grimm provides his readers with the most elaborate and programmatic exposition on the ideas underlying this undertaking. It is here that he takes on the criticasters of the first edition, who had criticized Grimm's choice and treatment of source material. He opens the preface with a sneer at those who dared to think of Tacitus's *Germania* (*c.* AD 98, rediscovered in 1425), which he characterized as an 'immortal document' and a 'morning glow in the history of Germany which is to be envied by other peoples', as a medieval forgery.[7] How could people in their right minds actually believe that anyone in the Middle Ages would have been capable of producing such a monumental piece of classical literature? Similar scorn is bestowed upon those who did not share his view on historical continuity, and who had nothing better to do than to reject Grimm's precious *überbleibseln* ***unsers*** *heidenthums* ('remnants of *our* paganism') (italics added)

[6] References to Roman and Greek culture occur primarily where older Germanic concepts — mainly relating to ritual — are concerned.

[7] *[D]urch eines Römers unsterbliche schrift war ein morgenroth in die geschichte Deutschlands gestellt worden, um das uns andere völker zu beneiden haben* (Grimm 1844: v).

of pre-Christian culture — which he compared to written accounts such as the *Germania* or the Eddas — as later imports, or of Christian origin. To deny the reality of a German mythology was, in his eyes, as serious an offence as denying *das hohe alter und die andauer unsrer sprache* ('the high antiquity and continuity of our language'), since every nation needed gods as much as it needed language. Although he does not use the word itself, the patriotic language in which he rallies against his opponents creates the impression that he sees them as traitors towards the German nation. Their attack on his 'authentic' and 'national' sources goes beyond mere antiquarian rhetoric, and is an insult to the German *Volksseele* herself. He who fails to recognize that the verses of the 'Nordic Edda' breathe a 'most distant antiquity' and therefore 'touch our heart very differently than the excessively admired Ossian poetry', and he who seeks to reduce the Edda's entire contents to later Christian and Anglo-Saxon influence, is quite simply blind.[8]

To Grimm — as to other philologists dedicated to the cultural regeneration of their nation — the eddic poems constituted a benchmark of national authenticity, and a trustworthy tool in the process of separating that which is national and authentic (that is: Germanic) from later Christian, Roman or Slavic imports. Together with his brother Wilhelm he had already published a German edition of the heroic poems in 1815 (Grimm and Grimm 1815), the year in which Napoleon was definitively defeated at Waterloo. By studying the Poetic Edda and comparing it to the remnants of pagan religion in modern culture, the nation could finally come to 'know itself' again (Halink 2015: 246). The use of Nordic sources in the quest for German mythology was perfectly justified in the eyes of Grimm and many of his contemporaries, as long as the distinctions between West and North Germanic culture were not ignored:

> sie liegt uns nah wie die nordische sprache, deren länger ungestört gebliebne aufrechthaltung reichen blick in die natur der deutschen gestattet, ohne dass beide

[8] *Die nordische edda, deren anlage, gestalt und gehalt entlegenste vorzeit athmet, deren lieder ganz anders an unser herz greifen als die im überzwank bewunderte ossianische dichtung, brachte man auf christlichen und angelsächsischen einfluss zurück, übersah blind oder geflissentlich ihren zusammenhang mit den spuren des innern deutschen alterthums* (Grimm 1844: v–vi). The poems of Ossian to which Grimm refers had mesmerized European intellectuals en masse since their first appearance in 1760. Before these supposedly ancient poems were exposed as the creations — but not outright forgeries, since they were based on actual oral traditions — of their translator and editor James Macpherson, they were translated into many languages and caused a worldwide 'Ossian vogue' and 'Celtic revival' that would affect individuals as diverse as Goethe, Napoleon, Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson.

> vollständig in einander aufgiengen, oder dass einzelne tugenden der deutschen sprache und die beiden zusammen überlegne kraft der gothischen könnten geleugnet werden. auch die nordischen götterverhältnisse dürfen die deutschen vielfach läutern und vervollständigen, aber nicht alleinige richtschnur für sie geben, da sich, wie in der sprache, einzelne abweichungen des deutschen von dem nordischen typus ergeben, die jedem derselben bald zum vorzug bald zum nachtheil gereichen. hätte ich den vollen nordischen reichthum der untersuchung zum grunde gelegt, so würde von ihm die deutsche besonderheit gefährlich überwuchert worden sein, die vielmehr aus sich selbst entfaltet werden soll und zwar jenen oft zusagt, in vielem aber auch gegenüber steht. (Grimm 1844: viii)

> ([Nordic mythology] is close to us, as is the Nordic language, whose long undisturbed survival provides us with rich insight into the nature of the German one, without both having completely merged with each other. Nor can individual virtues of the German language, and the force of the Gothic language, superior to both, be denied. Also, the system of the Nordic gods may refine and complement the German one, but it cannot be its sole directive, because of, as in language, individual German deviations from the Nordic type [...]. If I were to have founded this study on the full wealth of the North, this would have dangerously overgrown the German peculiarity, which should rather be unfolded from itself and which, although in accordance with the North in many ways, often disagrees with it.)

However, despite these carefully formulated reservations, Grimm *did* envision a larger unity of Germanic mythology, comprising both the North and West Germanic world-view, beyond the borders of his present study: *Die lage der dinge scheint also die zu sein, dass bei fortschreitendem betrieb wir der nordischen grenze entgegen rücken und endlich der punct erscheinen wird, auf dem der wall zu durchstechen ist und beide mythologien zusammenrinnen können in ein grösseres ganzes* ('Thus it appears to be the case that, as the project progresses, we proceed towards the Nordic border, and finally the point at which the wall can be pierced and both mythologies can merge into a larger whole will appear') (Grimm 1844: viii). Following Grimm's taxonomical approach, the degree of separation between German and Nordic mythology depended on how far one was willing to travel back in time; at some point in time, both systems had dovetailed from a common, primeval and pan-Germanic root-mythology, glimpses of which could be discerned by comparing the two. To any German scholar who wanted to penetrate the heart of the Germanic national character, Scandinavia and especially the isolated refuge of Iceland — where no Roman contamination of the original sources could ever have occurred — should be considered 'classical soil' (*klassischer Boden*; Neckel 1930). In their medieval literature, the Icelanders had preserved much of Germanic lore and history which had been irrevocably lost on the European mainland.

Convenient Vagueness

Grimm was not the first German to look upon the Old Norse heritage as an enlightening survivor of that which the Germans themselves had lost. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the influential thinker — and pioneer of modern national thought — Johann Gottfried von Herder had solidified the link between mythology and the primordial, ethnic character of a nation, or *Volksgeist*, a concept inspired by Voltaire's and Montesquieu's *esprit*. He argued that every nation, and therefore every mythological system, had its own intrinsic value, and could therefore not be considered superior or inferior to any other. Thus, Germanic and Nordic culture was emancipated in the face of the cultural hegemony of Greece and Rome:

> Die bis zum achten Jahrhundert dunkle Geschichte der nordischen Reiche hat vor den Geschichten der meisten europäischen Länder den Vorzug, daß ihr eine Mythologie mit Liedern und Sagen zugrunde liegt, die ihre Philosophie sein kann. Denn in ihr lernen wir den Geist des Volkes kennen, die Begriffe desselben von Göttern und Menschen, die Richtung seiner Neigungen und Leidenschaften in Liebe und Haß, in Erwartungen dies- und jenseits des Grabes — eine Philosophie der Geschichte, wie sie uns außer der Edda nur die griechische Mythologie gewährt. (Herder 1792: 217)

> (The dim history of the Nordic realms until the eighth century has an advantage over the histories of most other European countries, in that it is founded on a mythology with lays and legends, which can be its philosophy. For it is in them that we get to know the spirit [*Geist*] of the nation [*Volk*], and its understanding of gods and humans, the direction of their inclinations and their passions in both love and hate, their expectations on both sides of the grave — a philosophy of history as it is revealed, apart from the Edda, only in Greek mythology.)

The primacy of mythology in the formulation of essential, national characters immediately posed a problem where Herder's own national identity was concerned: Germany, it appeared, did not possess a national mythology of its own. But rather than turning their attention to the south, Herder argued, German poets would be better off searching for inspiration in the *Mythologie eines benachbarten Volks, auch Deutschen Stammes* ('mythology of a neighbouring people, also of German stock'), which could serve as 'replacement' (*Ersatz*) of that which the Germans themselves had lost over the centuries (Herder 1883 [1796]: 486–94; Von See 1970: 34; cf. Volume 1 of this study, Chapter 5.1). The idea that German culture should be rejuvenated through an influx of Nordic inspiration was expressed in Herder's programmatic and aptly titled treatise on

the didactic value of poetry, *Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* ('Iduna, or the Apple of Rejuvenation', 1796), referring to the Norse goddess Iðunn, wife of Bragi (god of poetry), whose apples keep the Æsir eternally young. Herder's enthusiasm for Old Norse mythology was not shared by all German poets, and Classicism would remain a strong current in German literary history well into the nineteenth century. The Proto-Romantic *Sturm und Drang* movement itself, for which Herder's ideas are considered foundational, found much of its historical inspiration not in the Eddas, but in the tragedies and epics of ancient Greece. Nevertheless, the German indigenization of Old Norse mythology, or what Carl Roos has labelled 'the dream of the North in German intellectual life' (Roos 1967: 223), spearheaded by Herder and like-minded Nordic enthusiasts of his generation, would become a pivotal factor in Germany's quest for national authenticity in the turbulent century and a half to come.

Herder provided his fellow Germans with the theoretical justification for appropriating the ancient culture and mythology of the 'neighbouring' Scandinavians, resulting in a modest increase in scholarly works on Old Norse mythology in the decades around 1800, the turbulent age of the Napoleonic Wars. Often, the authors of these treatises were inspired in their scholarly endeavours by a passionate, patriotic hatred towards everything French. Among Jacob Grimm's most notable predecessors were the nationalist and anti-Semitic historian Friedrich Christian Rühs, the philologist Johann Arnold Kanne, as well as the aforementioned pioneer of taxonomical methods in comparative mythology, Georg Friedrich Creuzer. Friedrich David Gräter, who is considered one of the founding fathers of Nordic philology in Germany (Heinrichs 1986) and to whom we will return later, has also to be mentioned here. In his *DM*, Grimm would assess these earlier treatments of German(ic) mythology with a very critical eye. But what Grimm and virtually all his patriotic predecessors had in common was a strong belief in the shared national characteristics of Germans, Scandinavians, and all other Germanic peoples — including the Dutch and the Anglo-Saxons — as expressed in the sagas, poetry and mythology of Old Norse literature. Foremost among these characteristics were — in line with the political aspirations of the age — a defiant spirit, combined with philosophical profundity and nature or tree worship (Shippey 2005: 14). The concept of the dark Teutonic forest, in which the Germanic chieftain Arminius had once gathered his troops and successfully annihilated three entire Roman legions (AD 9) had acquired crucial symbolic significance in the struggle against the oppressive 'new Romans' from France. It was between the German oaks that the native *Volksgeist* slumbered, both in the distant past and in the present. Trees and forests became the objects of Romantic veneration in the verses of

patriotic poets such as Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, who envisioned himself as a direct descendant of Arminius, or 'Hermann' as he became more affectionately known among German patriots. With his celebration of Hermann as the protector of German culture, Klopstock initiated an antagonistic form of ideological northernism which would spread through Germany, and become the central creed of a group of 'bardic' poets known as the *Göttinger Hainbund*. Certain passages of *DM*, which firmly embed Germanic paganism in this idealized German landscape, are clearly composed in the same spirit of patriotic forest veneration and read more like fragments of Romantic nature poetry than academic scholarship (Heizmann 2013: from 00:50:40 onwards).

It is important to note that, whatever consecutive generations of German nationalists may have done to their intellectual inheritance, neither Grimm nor Herder should be considered racists or proto-Fascists. The cultural nativism they nourished in their writings did not facilitate any notion of German superiority over other nations, or the superiority of any nation for that matter. Herder's pioneering ideas on nationalism are more easily compared to those of Guiseppe Mazzini, who envisioned a politically unified Europe based on the equality and freedom of all individual nations (Mack Smith 1996: 11–12). However, since the term 'Germany' lacked any form of clearly demarcated political definition — the 'German lands' were divided into well over three hundred independent political entities, such as cities, archbishoprics and states — a sense of German unity was difficult to cultivate. The elusive nature of this ideal was best expressed by Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, who exclaimed: *Deutschland? Aber wo liegt es? Ich weiss das Land nicht zu finden* ('Germany? Where is that? I cannot find the country') (Goethe and Schiller 1893: 14). Frustrating though this political indeterminacy may have been to German patriots, it also rendered the proposition 'German' incredibly flexible and elastic, which facilitated a high degree of cultural expansiveness. Where there are no boundaries, the cultural prestige of a neighbouring people is more easily appropriated. The still 'potentially explosive' terminology (Shippey 2005: 11) employed in establishing a German national character — *deutsch* ('German'), *germanisch* ('Germanic'), *nordisch* ('Nordic'), and so forth — was highly fluid, and scholars like the Grimm brothers would mobilize this convenient vagueness to their advantage. To Jacob Grimm, 'Germanic' and 'German' were by no means interchangeable synonyms: Old Norse could and should, both linguistically and culturally, be classified as Germanic, but certainly not as German. However, by emphasizing the cultural bonds between the German lands and their Germanic neighbours, he accentuated the divide between the Romanic South and the Germanic North, while simultaneously moving the boundaries of Germany's cultural prestige far

beyond the borders of what many people — especially in the North — were willing to consider German. It can be argued that, implicitly, Grimm addressed the prickly Schleswig-Holstein question (Danish: Slesvig-Holsten), over which Denmark and Prussia fought two wars in the nineteenth century, by simply ascribing this hotly disputed territory to the German cultural area rather than the Danish one (e.g., Grimm 1844: xiii; Wood 2013: 169–71). Similarly, the monumental collection of primary sources of 'German history' from antiquity until 1500 — initiated by Heinrich Friedrich Karl Freiherr von Stein in 1819 — published under the name *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* maintained a very inclusive interpretation of the term 'German nation', including Austrian, Polish, British, Czech, Spanish, Dutch and Italian sources — among others — on the basis of their Germanic character. Also, Wilhelm Grimm included the collection *Altdänische Heldenlieder, Balladen und Märchen* ('Old Danish Heroic Songs, Ballads and Fairy Tales', 1811) in his growing corpus of retrieved German folk narratives, which he regarded as an organic component of the larger German tradition. The national self-aggrandizement showcased in these works provided academic foundations for the political aspirations of Romantic nationalism, and could be used as a rhetorical tool in the process of establishing the geographical extent of a unified Germany. The Grimms affiliated themselves to this ideal of unification by providing the nation with a standardized German language, a canonized corpus of national tales, songs and folklore, and a comprehensive systematized mythology. Their intention to remedy the wrong of a fractured Germany is also illustrated by the dedication of *DM* to the historian and politician Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann, who belonged — together with the Grimm brothers — to the group of seven Göttingen professors (*Göttinger Sieben*) who objected to the abolition of the constitution of the Kingdom of Hanover in 1837, and were fired for it. Dahlmann also helped draft a constitution for the short-lived National Parliament of Frankfurt (*Frankfurter Nationalversammlung*) of 1848–49. The Grimms' political affiliations were clear for all to see, and in most of their writings, scholarship, politics and Romantic nationalism are inextricably intertwined.

Protestant Pagans

The encyclopaedic appearance and scholarly erudition of *DM* cannot conceal the fact that the work constitutes, in many respects, a highly charged ideological manifesto. Grimm's political and religious preferences are nowhere clearly articulated or expressed directly, but they slumber implicitly between the lines and in the whole layout and texture of the study. These may seem

harmless enough on the surface, but closer inspection leads to the far-reaching implications of Grimm's systematization. Considering the eclectic and incoherent nature of the sources, forcing the complete Germanic world-view as 'reconstructed' by Grimm into one single all-pervading system is academically questionable to say the least, and most likely even intentionally distortive. In order to create the illusion of cohesion and organic structure, Grimm modelled his Germanic pantheon on that of the ancient Greeks, forcing a strict classical hierarchy on what was in fact a geographically and chronologically diffuse, untameable hotchpotch of fragments. Applying Greek hierarchy to the Germanic gods was more than simply a clever artifice for the sake of much needed orderliness; it was primarily informed by the aesthetic ideals of Neoclassicism, which propagated the superiority of Greek over Roman culture. This philhellenic movement originated from the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the archaeologist and historian who in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) for the first time systematized the history of the arts in historical categories, and thereby laid the foundations of what would become known as antiquarian scholarship. He blamed the decline of 'good taste' in painting and sculpture in the ancient world on the increase of Roman influence, which eventually came to overshadow Hellas and to distort and corrupt the classical perfection of the ancient Greeks. In the modern age, in which the 'good taste' which had 'originated under the skies of ancient Greece' (*Der gute Geschmack* […] *hat sich angefangen zuerst unter dem griechischen Himmel zu bilden*) (Winckelmann 1756: 1) was becoming more prevalent throughout Europe, artists and architects should turn their backs on Rome to find inspiration in Greece, the cradle of all that was good and beautiful. Winckelmann's ideas grew incredibly influential in Germany and triggered a wave of German art and literature inspired by the heritage of Greece in the decades around 1800: Goethe, Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Hölderlin, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Heinrich Heine are but a few of Winckelmann's most prominent adherents. The Hellenistic paradigm also influenced Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideas on education (*Bildung*) and his reform of the Prussian education system around 1810. As the Prussian capital Berlin was fashioning itself as a new 'Athens by the Spree', the use of Greek templates in the representation of Germanic culture appears to have been the most patriotic thing to do. Association with the Olympians can be considered a vehicle of emancipation for the neglected and nearly forgotten indigenous gods, and an attempt to render the Germanic, national myths as 'classical' as their Greek counterparts. It was, in short, a way to increase the 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu) and national prestige of the fatherland.

Grimm's brand of German (and decidedly anti-French) patriotism was inseparably tied to his religious world-view, which was profoundly Lutheran and anti-Catholic. In this anachronistic and polemical discourse, the Romans — those who had put an end to the 'good taste' of the Greeks, and who had forced the Germans to forget their indigenous mythology — came to signify everything that was considered Catholic, Southern (as opposed to Nordic), decadent, degenerate, French, *in*-authentic and *anti*-national. Germanic culture, however, could — just like Greek civilization — be fashioned as historical prefigurations of Protestant truth, values and society (Böldl 2000: 42–63). Therefore, Grimm avoided any reference to an 'organised priestly class' in pre-Christian Germany, since that would be considered too Catholic (Shippey 2005: 14). It may seem paradoxical to defend Protestantism against the perversion of Roman Catholicism through the cultivation of *pagan* culture, but in the national ideology of Grimm this was not an issue; as a good Christian, Grimm was convinced of God's omnipotence, and he considered the whole of human history as a steady unfolding of His divine plan for mankind. As an earlier stage in God's plan, Germanic heathenism was not barbaric or spiritual darkness — for what benevolent God would let mankind, created in His own image, toil in darkness? — but rather a more concealed expression of His universal truths. The totality of Grimm's Germanic world-view is presented in a comprehensive, structured hierarchy, descending from the Supreme Being and the worship thereof, through the world of the gods and goddesses and the realm of man to the dwelling places of the non-human creatures that 'people' the mythical imagination (Shippey 2005: 14). The gods constitute in this rationalization simply the *vervielfachung der einen, höchsten unersaslichen gottheit* ('multiplication of the one, highest and imperative Godhead') who is Himself not to be depicted: *die gottheit wirklich abzubilden fällt rein unmöglich, darum hat bereits der decalog des AT. solche bilder untersagt* ('truly depicting the Godhead is utterly impossible, which is why the Decalogue of the Old Testament already forbade such images') (Grimm 1844: xliv). With this rather creative take on the Ten Commandments, Grimm washed Germanic culture clean of any moral flaw it may have possessed in the eyes of a Christian audience. Pre-Christian polytheism, which at least abstained — in good Protestant fashion — from depicting the Almighty, was to be preferred to Catholicism, with its blatant offences against this divine prohibition. Grimm's theological justification of Germanic mythology is a continuation of the aforementioned defence against his critics, now by metaphysical means. But it did not merely 'justify' an appropriate level of admiration for the pagan past: it almost rendered it a national and theological *duty*. The contrast with the traditional Christian stance against

paganism and polytheism can hardly be overestimated. Grimm's synchronization of Protestant theology and Germanic mythology facilitated a new, overtly Romantic and pantheistic attitude towards the ancient gods, characterized by a strong reverence for the awe-inspiring and the sublime in nature.

German Mythomania

The new, Romantic paradigm in comparative mythology was not embraced by all. Among those who did not think much of the irrational Romantic practices of his contemporaries was Friedrich David Gräter, a much-respected pioneer of Scandinavian philology in Germany. According to the Grimmian model, the solid foundation of any legend (*Sage*) is always mythology, and where historical events have all but disappeared in the mists of time, they are linked to legendary narratives and replace those parts of the legend's mythological foundations which are weakest and about to disappear. The epic (*Epos*) is interpreted as a congruence of myth (*Mythos*) and history (*Geschichte*) (Grimm 1835: iii). Gräter's view on these matters was radically different and was firmly rooted in the ancient theory of euhemerism, which had been popular among Nordic mythographers since the days of Snorri Sturluson.[9] Rather than myth, history constituted the foundation of all other narrative genres, including mythology and legend. This idea was disseminated in Gräter's popular periodicals *Bragur* (eight volumes) and *Idunna und Hermode*, and his anthology *Nordische Blumen* ('Nordic Flowers') of 1789, through which many German readers were first acquainted with Nordic poetry. In one of his writings, *Der Donnergott und der Asiate Thor* ('The Thunder God and the Asian Thor'), published in *Bragur*, he largely reiterates Snorri's account of the travels of a band of people from the East (Asians, or 'Æsir'), including the mighty king Odin, who travelled to Scandinavia and paid visits to numerous German chieftains along the way. Due to deliberate deception, the naïve locals were tricked into believing that they were not humans but gods, worthy of ritual worship. Thus, the cult of the Æsir was initiated in Germany and Scandinavia (Gräter 1812). By the time this piece

[9] The theory of euhemerism entails that gods and myths are the result of the gradual deification of initially historical characters — such as powerful kings, or heroes with almost superhuman strength — and events. This rational interpretation is named after the Greek mythographer Euhemerus (fourth century BC), who first explained the origin of myth in this fashion at the court of King Cassander of Macedon. Several chapters (e.g., 1.2, 2.1.1) in Volume 1 of this study consider the influence of euhemerism on the medieval and later reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North.

was published, euhemerism was already on its retour, since scholars had already established that a historical invasion of 'Asian gods' in Europe could hardly account for the great similarities between Indo-European mythologies from Iceland to India. It was incompatible with the new etiological models, based on the comparative study of myth (Halink 2015: 244–45). After Gräter published a negative review of Wilhelm Grimm's *Altdänische Heldenlieder, Balladen und Märchen* (1811), the Grimm brothers reacted with a highly polemical rejection of Gräter and his ridiculous, outdated theories (Böldl 2000: 116). They were never soft on their intellectual opponents, and their sarcastic reckonings with euhemerists and other antiquarian views associated with the Enlightenment (Poser 1979) were largely assigned to oblivion. Through polemics, the Grimmian paradigm was firmly established in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

In the decades after the publication of the first edition of *DM*, there followed a veritable flood of publications — both academic and popular — on the topic of German(ic) mythology: a field of research most people had 'considered barren' (*auf einem öde geglaubten felde*) before Grimm presented his 'new mythology' (Grimm 1844: v). The downright 'mythomania' (*Mythenmanie*; Heizmann 2013: 00:8:43), or *epidemieartigen beschäftiging mit mythologischen Fragen im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* ('epidemic-like occupation with mythological questions in the nineteenth century'; Kellner 1994: 1) ensuing from this paradigm shift, produced a range of studies that would stand the test of time and remain required — albeit somewhat outdated — reading for mythologists up to the present day. Among Grimm's most influential disciples, who sought to satisfy Germany's Romantic 'longing for myth' (Williamson 2004), were Johann Wilhelm Wolf — who wrote a book for 'in school and at home' (Wolf 1852) based on *DM*, and founded the *Zeitschrift für deutsche Mythologie und Sittenkunde* ('Journal of German Mythology and Morality', 2 vols, 1853–55) — as well as the folklorist Wilhelm Mannhardt, who became a Grimm enthusiast as a youth and who claimed that the course of his life was decided after having read *DM* (Perabo 2014: 43). The most eminent German philologist directly affected by the success of *DM* was Karl Joseph Simrock, who published his very diplomatically titled *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie mit Einschluß der nordischen* ('Handbook of German Mythology including the Nordic') in 1855. In the introduction to this work, Simrock places himself firmly in the Grimmian tradition by proclaiming that mythology is more than merely stories about gods and goddesses, and that he who wants to glimpse a reflection of *das Bewustsein des Volks in der vorhistorischen Zeit* ('the consciousness of the nation in prehistoric times') therein will have to penetrate to a deeper level of myth-interpretation (Simrock 1855: 1).

Within his own lifetime, Jacob Grimm became a mythological figure in his own right, a prophet-like revealer of ancient mysteries, and reading his books or attending his lectures constituted semi-religious, life-changing events in the lives of many. And as in the case of an actual religious cult, heretics and dissenters who did not (fully) subscribe to Grimm's dogmas of continuity and Germanic unity were dealt with harshly. When the legal historian and 'Iceland friend' Konrad Maurer, who had been a student of Grimm and had collected an impressive body of Icelandic folk-tales (Maurer 1860), dared to propose that the Icelandic sagas were first and foremost works of *literature* — rather than history — produced by the Icelandic minds that entrusted the story to parchment in the Middle Ages, this caused quite a stir among his German colleagues. Maurer's critical stance towards the historicity of the stories was a controversial one, since it undermined the crucial assumption of an ancient oral tradition underlying Old Norse-Icelandic literature, which could be traced back to mainland Scandinavia and the even older substrata of Germanic culture. In short: this hypothesis of ancient oral threads of transmission, binding Iceland firmly to its Germanic cousins in Europe, justified the appropriative approach to Old Norse culture as practised by German scholars. Denying this oral tradition was therefore a hazardous offence against the entire structure of Grimmian philology (Halink 2016). One of Grimm's most dedicated followers, Karl Müllenhoff, took offence and accused Maurer of defiling the nest of German national philology — prepared by the great Grimm himself! — with his detestable view 'from Mount Hekla', or *Heckelberg* in German (Müllenhoff 1908: 64–66; Zernack 2008: 251). Here, the Icelandic volcano signifies not a German(ic) but rather an *Icelandic* outlook on Old Norse literature, which virtually uncoupled it from the larger body of Germanic culture, and thus fractured the original oneness of the Germanic world as enshrined in Grimm's paradigm.

However, even Grimm's pit-bull Müllenhoff sometimes struggled with the often impenetrable writings of his master, and even admitted to being 'horribly annoyed' by the fourth volume of Grimm's *Kleinere Schriften* (Müllenhoff 1868). Grimm's immense erudition was admired by many, but — especially towards the end of his career — the notoriously unstructured accumulation of facts, unchecked by any form of generalization or unifying conclusion, rendered much of his work virtually unreadable. In the end, as Shippey concludes (2005: 23), Grimm's 'eclecticism has defeated its own end'. As far as Grimm's mythological writings are concerned, the structural flaws pointed out by his contemporaries and later generations of mythologists have proven insurmountable. Mythology is no grammar, and unlike his linguistic theories — which are still an integral part of historical linguistics — his approach to mythology

failed to produce any academically acceptable results. Grimm did not succeed in duplicating the academic triumph of his *Deutsche Grammatik* in the field of comparative mythology, simply by transposing his tested methodology from one to the other. *Deutsche Mythologie* did not become the *Origin of Species* of comparative mythology. While trying to keep up the appearance of academic objectivity, grave lacunas in our knowledge of pre-Christian religion seem to have instilled in Grimm a *horror vacui*, which resulted in highly speculative and — also by the standards of his own age — flawed scholarship.

A good example of this is the subject of prayer in heathenism, of which we know absolutely nothing. Grimm whole-heartedly admits that there is no historical evidence to rely on whatsoever, but for some reason, this does not prevent him from speculating about all the physical postures the pagan ancestor was likely to have adopted while addressing his deities: from kneeling, bending his knees, gazing upwards to the sky, to piously folding his hands together (Grimm 1844: 27–30). Grimm provides no foundation for these speculations, but it is not difficult to unmask them as anachronisms, backward projections of a Christian concept of prayer, which strengthen the utopian image of a pious, proto-Protestant culture (Kellner 1994). But filling the lacunas in our knowledge with unfounded fantasies is not Grimm's only offence against academic standards. His determination to present the reader with a clearly structured world-view, with a pantheon based on Greek templates, influenced his interpretation of the sources to the point of utter distortion. Since Wuotan/Wodan/Óðinn was the great progenitor of the Æsir and the Allfather, Grimm assigned to him the archetypal role of 'father of the gods': a benevolent and good creator-god whose powers border on omnipotence, and who is not an uncommon figure in classical mythologies (Heizmann 2013: 00:46:21). Forcing the often terrible and cruel Allfather into this narrow category of the fatherly benefactor required a rigorous rewriting of the god's characteristics, and a thoroughly selective treatment of the sources. Grimm's Wuotan is the god of wisdom, a profound philosopher, creator of all beauty, the source of poetry and the decider of battles. But his darker side, his deceptive character and his human-like weaknesses are largely ignored (Grimm 1844: 120–50).

A more substantial debate about Grimm's two most foundational assumptions — or dogmas — namely, that of historical continuity and Germanic unity, did not eventuate until after 1945, when German nationalism had shown its most destructive side and any glorification of Germanic antiquity stood under suspicion. The presupposition of a monolithic Germanic culture, of which Scandinavian and German culture are mere regional variations, became highly problematic. German scholars distanced themselves from these contaminated

views, and a comparative methodology in which German and Nordic traditions could be combined to clarify both was disfavoured. Scholars like Beate Kellner have tended to look upon Scandinavian culture as virtually separate from the Germanic cultures of mainland Europe, declaring the fissure between the two unbridgeable, and attempts to explain Continental paganism by referring to Scandinavian material invalid (Kellner 1994). In recent years, this very rigid separation of these two cultural spheres has been somewhat softened by scholars like Wilhelm Heizmann, who argues that the similarities in symbolic language and mythological narratives do suggest some level of cultural uniformity, connecting the Germanic tribes of the Black Sea to others in Central Europe and Scandinavia (Heizmann 2013).

Grimm's other central thesis, however, the one pertaining to historical continuity, has proven even more sensitive than the first one, and has largely been rejected by the German academic establishment. According to Grimm, much could be learned by analysing contemporary rural folklore, rituals, processions and festivities — more often than not appropriated by the Church and linked to the cult of a saint — and stripping them of their overtly Christian elements, in order to arrive at a reasonably valid reconstruction of what the same traditions may have looked like in pre-Christian times. The assumption that everything that is not immediately recognizable as 'Christian' in a stricter sense is therefore automatically very ancient, primordial and national, has led to the Romantic glorification of an unspoiled rural culture which eventually degenerated into the racial *Blut und Boden* ('blood and soil') ideology of National Socialism. As with so much in Grimm's scholarship, localizing the origin of rural traditions and rituals — no matter how 'pagan' they may appear to us today — in the mists of an imagined prehistory, is always highly speculative. This of course does not mean that the *possibility* of pagan remnants in contemporary culture — such as the Christmas tree, or the yule log — should be denied categorically; it simply entails a full recognition and acknowledgement of the fact that we can never know anything for certain, and that dating any of these phenomena will always remain a matter of speculation.

Templates for National Appropriation

In the preface to the second edition of *Deutsche Mythologie*, Grimm argues that his use of the more complete Nordic sources in a comparative context is by no means only of benefit to the Germans; in his view, the Scandinavians received much in return. His presentation of a unified Germanic mythology did not only supply the Germans with a mythology of their own, it also offered

Grimm's colleagues in the North a deepened and more complete understanding of their own mythological heritage. According to Grimm, the Scandinavian and Continental sources complement and enhance each other:

> Den nordischen alterthumsforschern, hoffe ich, wird mein verfahren gerade willkommen sein: wie wir ihnen für empfangnes gern wieder geben, sollen sie nicht allein geben sondern auch empfangen. unsere denkmäler sind ärmlicher aber älter, die ihrigen jünger und reiner; zweierlei festzuhalten, daran war es hier gelegen: dass die nordische mythologie echt sei, folglich auch die deutsche, und dass die deutsche alt sei, folglich auch die nordische. (Grimm 1844: viii)
>
> (I hope that my project will be warmly welcomed by Nordic antiquarians: as we want to return the favour for that which we receive, they should not only give but also receive. Our [German pagan] monuments are poorer but older, theirs are younger and purer; holding on to these two, that has been the purpose of this: that Nordic mythology is real, and consequently the German one as well, and that German mythology is ancient, and consequently the Nordic one as well.)

However, the Scandinavian reception of his work was overall not in line with Grimm's positive expectations: whereas the Germans were nowhere in their reconstruction of a German mythology without the fullness of the Scandinavian sources, the Scandinavians did not seem too dependent on Germanic remnants from the mainland to prove that their mythology was an ancient one. Since evidence from letters between the Grimm brothers and Scandinavian scholars suggests that neither of the brothers was terribly proficient in Old Norse, they depended heavily on their correspondence with prominent Scandinavian scholars such as Rasmus Christian Rask and Finnur Magnússon for their interpretation of Scandinavian texts (Schmidt 1885). But the relationship between the brothers and their Nordic colleagues was often rather lukewarm, and occasionally deteriorated into — justifiable — accusations of plagiarism: 'Grimm's law', for instance, was actually first discovered and discussed by Rask (see Chapter 7.1 of Volume 1 of this study for more details of Rask's work) and is now sometimes more correctly referred to as 'Rask's Grimm's rule' (Halink 2015: 243, 260). Jacob Grimm's questionable reputation in Nordic academia did little to enthuse Scandinavian scholars for his appropriative interpretation of the term 'Germanic' (Shippey 2005: 11), which — in spite of his resolution to differentiate between the terms 'German' and 'Germanic' — effectively amounted to a cultural Germanification of everything Scandinavian. The nineteenth century was the age of Scandinavian nationalism as well, and foreign appropriations of Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Icelandic national heritage were not particularly well received. In the mythological studies of the Icelandic

runologist and philologist Finnur Magnússon, for instance, Old Norse mythology is presented as the cultural heritage of *all* the Nordic nations, and as a blueprint for truly national art in this age of renewed national awareness (Halink 2015: 246–47). Nowhere does he include the Germans in this national discourse, and the synthetic adjective 'Germanic' is of hardly any relevance in his treatment of the topic.

Paradoxically, Scandinavian nationalists — scholars, poets and artists alike — who actively debunked German claims on Nordic culture, tended to formulate their national arguments along the lines of that very same Herderian philosophy that had facilitated Grimm's appropriation of the North. The threat of German expansiveness, as exemplified by the Grimms, quickly led to *imitations* of the Grimmian model in the countries surrounding Germany — notably Denmark — where folk-tale collections and mythology were now considered instrumental in the demarcation and articulation of the nation, especially vis-à-vis foreign appropriation attempts. A good example in case is Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig's passionate rebellion against everything Prussian and 'Roman' in Danish culture (see further Chapter 1.1 above and Chapter 8.1 in Volume 1 of this study). Grundtvig — himself a Lutheran priest, philosopher and a figurehead of Romantic nationalism in Denmark — regarded Old Norse mythology as a Nordic symbolic language, or picture-language, in which universal truths were revealed. His approach to the Old Norse sources is not very academic, and, as stated by Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, his 'synthetic understanding, "the vision", has priority over the sources, which he rejects as late and spurious if they do not fit in with his interpretation. [...]. Grundtvig does not, as he alleges in the introduction to *Nordens Mytologi* [1808], see edda in edda's own light' (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1965: 20; Chase 2000: 67). Grundtvig believed that his method of 'research', based on intuition, would lead him to the very heart of the pagan message; a message he did not consider at odds with Christianity, but rather as a Nordic enhancement, or deepening of the Gospel. He envisioned his model of experiential mythology as an inspiration for his fellow countrymen, serving as a programme for national regeneration incorporated in the national educational system, with which Grundtvig was deeply concerned.

In its very essence, Grundtvig's mythological philosophy can be characterized as antagonistic. Not only elitist 'Southern' culture — signified as 'Rome' or 'Loki' — had to be opposed, but especially Denmark's arch-enemy Prussia and German, or 'Teutonic' culture in general, was to be rooted out. Grundtvig was well aware of the Germans' infatuation with Old Norse mythology, but he considered their Teutonic renderings thereof distorted and degenerate; the Germans were in fact Loki in disguise and posed a very real threat to Denmark.

He considered both Icelanders and Danes as the protectors of the original Old Norse tradition, who should join forces in 'some form of holy alliance' against the 'fierce attacks of German scholars' (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1994: 49). This polarizing discourse bears all the marks of its German origin, and is in fact merely a Danish reformulation of Grimm's narrative template of evil 'Romans' and good, proto-Protestant 'northerners'. The main difference is that the Germans, who first introduced this antagonistic mood, had now themselves become 'Romans', out to dominate and destroy Nordic culture; a very paradoxical claim that he could not have made without those very same 'Teutonic' scholars. In many respects, Grundtvig is a product of German Romantic ideas and represents that 'peculiar mixture of scholarship and poetry in the nineteenth century' (Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson 1999: 183) in which Christianity, nationalism and pagan mythology peacefully co-existed.

Even though *Deutsche Mythologie* constitutes an attempt to reconstruct the pre-Christian religion of ancient Germany, its effects on the mythic imagination were by no means restricted to the German-speaking lands. The work was translated into a wide variety of European languages, and it inspired intellectuals everywhere to undertake similar quests for their respective nations' own native religions (Leerssen 2016b). In doing so, these Romantic scholars developed their own vernacular mythologies, in which folklore functions 'as the echo of a primordial epic-mythical national substratum', and 'all ancient cultural heirlooms (phrases, tales, themes)' are placed 'in an ultimately anthropological perspective, with a pagan, aboriginal Germanic mythology for its vanishing point' (Leerssen 2016a). Grimm's reputation abroad as the leading authority on salvaging the national spirit from the mists of great antiquity even led to his name becoming an epitaph: every aspiring nation was in need of a Grimm of its own to salvage and canonize the very essence of the national spirit. Many scholars and amateurs in other countries were not merely inspired by Grimm's example, their endeavours were often actively endorsed by him, as the 'distinguished veteran scholar' (*hinum ágæta fræðimanna öldúngi…*: Jón Árnason 1862: iv) maintained an impressive network of correspondents. The Finnish folk-tale-collector Elias Lönnrot, the Breton philologist Théodore-Henri Hersart de la Villemarqué, as well as the Slavic scholars Josef Dobrovský and Vuk Stefanović Karadžić profited considerably — along with many others — from their positive association with Grimm.

From the translators' programmatic introductions to foreign adaptations of *DM*, it becomes clear that Grimm's template for the national appropriation of Nordic culture was not only relevant to Germany. The British educationist and translator James Steven Stallybrass gave his voluminous translation of the work

— based on the three-volume fourth edition, and complemented with a fourth volume of supplements (1882–88) — the name *Teutonic Mythology*, thus avoiding the terms 'German' and 'Germanic' and their potentially unfavourable political connotations. The term 'Teutonic' can be seen as an English variation of the Continental terms *nordisch* and *germanisch*, but without the overt association with German nationalism, and undetermined enough for the translator to allow it to include Anglo-Saxon. Stallybrass opens his introduction with a quote, not from the German master himself but from the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle, who — in his epochal work on heroes and hero-worship — explained the relevance of Old Norse mythology to modern Britain as follows:

> I think Scandinavian Paganism, to us here, is more interesting than any other. It is, for one thing, the latest; it continued in these regions of Europe till the eleventh century; 800 years ago the Norwegians were still worshippers of Odin. It is interesting also as the creed of our fathers; the men whose blood still runs in our veins, whom doubtless we still resemble in so many ways. [...] There is another point of interest in these Scandinavian mythologies, that they have been preserved so well. (Carlyle 1841: 19; Stallybrass 1882: v)

Grimm's *monolithic* image of Germanic mythology justified the appropriation and national cultivation of the Eddas throughout Europe. Like Herder before him, Carlyle advocated the cultivation of Old Norse myth — on the basis of its completeness — in order to achieve a better understanding of one's own ancestral mythology. Stallybrass subscribes to this notion, and credits Grimm with having revealed the unity of all 'Teutonic' mythologies:

> What Mr. Carlyle says of the Scandinavian will of course apply to all Teutonic tradition, so far as it can be recovered; and it was the task of Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie* to supplement the Scandinavian mythology (of which, thanks to the Icelanders, we happen to know most) with all that can be gleaned from other sources, High-Dutch and Low-Dutch, and build it up into a whole. And indeed to prove that it *was* one connected whole; for, strange as it seems for us, forty years ago it was still considered necessary to prove it. (Stallybrass 1882: v)

This last sentence especially gives us some idea of the impact of Grimm's ideas, and the enormous transformation this new paradigm of Germanic unity stimulated throughout Europe. In the Netherlands, the teacher and librarian Derk Buddingh followed Grimm's example and searched the Eddas for clues of a lost 'Dutch mythology', no less of an anachronism than 'German mythology'. Despite the cultural and natural differences between the Netherlands and Scandinavia, Buddingh was of the opinion that the closely related '*Æsir-system*

of the North' had preserved 'a benchmark, to which *Germania* and *Batavia* can bring the remnants of its myths of old for assessment'.[10] The Grimmian predilection for Germanic paganism would, in some cases, result in a critique of Christendom, which had had such detrimental effects on the nation's link with its primordial past. In his popular treatise on Germanic mythology, the Dutch teacher J. van Leeuwen (1897: v–vi) expresses the hope that his fellow countrymen will grow more fascinated by *den ouden godsdienst onzer voorvaderen, dien het christendom ons, Germanenvolkeren, heeft ontnomen, stellende een vreemden godsdienst in plaats van den ouden, die voortkwam uit het volksleven zelf. Hoe het christendom den taak, dien het in de germaansche landen op zich nam, heeft vervuld, wil ik hier niet beoordelen* ('the ancient religion of our ancestors, which Christianity has taken from us, the Germanic peoples, placing an alien faith in place of the old one, which had arisen from national life itself. How Christianity has fulfilled the task it has taken upon itself in the Germanic lands, I will not assess here'). Such anti-Christian sentiments, even when founded on a Grimmian fascination with everything national and pre-Christian, would — for reasons outlined above — not have met with Grimm's approval. But in the course of the nineteenth century, Grimm's legacy acquired a life of its own everywhere, from Britain to Norway, and even far beyond the borders of the 'Germanic world' in Estonia, where his model was implemented to reconstruct the nation's indigenous religion and mythology (Gay 2007).

However, nowhere would 'Grimm's ripples' (Gunnell 2012: 47) have a more profound effect than in Germany itself, where the Old Norse gods had become popular household names due to their appearance on stamps and popular collectables, produced by chocolate or meat manufacturers. They became so intertwined with Germany's national self-image, that Heimdallr — the god who guards Asgard's frontiers and blows his horn to warn the Æsir when the forces of Ragnarök approach — was mobilized, paradoxically, in both German *and* Danish propaganda concerning the national status of Slesvig and Holstein (Zernack 2011: 176–79). The German appropriation of Norse culture, initiated by Herder and Grimm, reached its zenith in the incredibly popular works of Richard Wagner, who based his 'German opera cycle', *Der Ring des Nibelungen* — which premiered in its entirety in 1876 — primarily on Nordic sources, including the Poetic Edda and *Völsunga saga*, rather than German

[10] "Evenwel het *Asenstelsel* van het noorden, bewaart eenen toetssteen, waaraan *Germanie* en *Batavie* de overblijfsels zijner vroegere mythen kan ter toetse brengen, als het naauwst met elkaar verwant" (italics original) (Buddingh 1844: 236–37).

ones (Árni Björnsson 2003; on Wagner, see also Chapter 4.1 below). Grimm's profound influence on Wagner's adaptations of these narratives is undeniable, and the composer admitted himself that the 'inordinate wealth' of *Deutsche Mythologie* 'gathered from all sides and really intended almost solely for scholars, had an immediately stimulating effect on me, who was looking everywhere for expressive and meaningful symbols' (Wagner 1983: 260). So popular was the Wagnerian rendition of the Nordic gods that Elard Hugo Meyer — the same man who curated the fourth edition of *DM* — considered it necessary to address the nation's growing interest in pre-Christian religion, fuelled by *die idealisierende Kunst Richard Wagners* ('Richard Wagner's idealizing art'; Meyer 1903: vii) with a more general introduction to Grimm's complex vision of a German mythology. By that time, the Old Norse myths had been — as a contributor to the *Westminster Review* noted already in 1854 — nourishing the 'tree of nationality' in Germany for generations, like 'potions from Mimir's well' (Neuberg 1854: 316). Establishing the full scope of the influence of Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* on German culture would lead too far, given the limited format of this contribution. But, based on the evaluation above, it is certainly safe to conclude that academic treatises, even if they did not bring about the scientific revolution they were intended to provoke, could have a formative effect on literature, the arts, on politics, national rhetoric and on the way in which entire nations imagined themselves into existence.

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3.6 – The Rise of Folklore Studies

John Lindow

The first great historian of the pre-Christian religions of the North was also arguably the first great folklorist of Europe. When Jacob Grimm published his *Deutsche Mythologie* (despite the title a treatment of Germanic religion, not German mythology) in 1835, he was already famous for the collaborative publication, with his brother Wilhelm, of German *Märchen* (Grimm and Grimm 1812–14) and legends (Grimm and Grimm 1816–18). Indeed, it would be difficult to overstate the importance of either of these works in the history of folklore scholarship. They established the basic generic categories used all over the world for oral prose narratives, even though *Märchen* comprise an inherently diverse set of materials: animal tales, fairy tales, jokes and anecdotes. Legends are to some degree more uniform, although subcategories have been proposed. It was the Grimms who bestowed on future scholars the distinction between *Märchen* and legends: *Das Märchen ist poetischer, die Sage historischer* ('The *Märchen* is more poetic, the legend is more historical') (Grimm and Grimm 1977 [1816–18]: 7). We now understand this distinction as invoking the credibility of the genres: animal tales, fairy tales, and jokes and anecdotes are less believable, while legends are more believable; indeed, a useful definition of legend is 'believable narrative'. But the Grimms also thought (and taught) that legends were more local. Scholars soon realized that *Märchen* readily crossed boundaries (more on this below), and although we now know that legends do so just as readily, that fact was not apparent at the time, and

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legends were thought of as more local and therefore as even more national than *Märchen*. Thus, in the preface to his *Norske sagn*, the first systematic publication of legends from any of the Nordic countries, Andreas Faye (1833: iii–xxxi) began his argument concerning the interest and value of such a collection by asserting that legends about supernatural beings could function as a kind of commentary on the myths of the Eddas, and he even drew Þórr into his discussion. But although he published his work two years before Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, Faye's work was a collection, not an analytic work. Grimm's *Mythologie* is thus probably not only the first modern scholarly work treating the pre-Christian religions of the North, it is also the first modern scholarly work treating this subject to rely on folklore as a data source. Indeed, according to a 1972 encyclopedia, with his *Mythologie*, Jacob Grimm 'laid the scientific basis for folklore research' (Leach 1972: 466).

Here it is necessary to have clear that folklore has two meanings in the contemporary academic world. The first is the older and is indeed aboriginal. The term *folklore* only entered English in 1846, a neologism (originally *folk-lore*) coined by the antiquarian Ambrose Merton (pseudonym of William J. Thoms) as a 'Saxon' replacement for the terms 'popular antiquities' and 'popular literature' (Merton 1846; see *OED online* s.v. *folklore*). Thoms stressed that he was talking about 'lore', about orally transmitted materials in a wide variety of genres, not just *Märchen*, legends and ballads but also 'superstitions' and customs and other material and behaviour, handed down from person to person outside of books. The other sense of folklore refers to an academic discipline, one which studies the materials in question, to be sure, but which also has (or had until recently) a set of tools and methods that those who practised the discipline mastered, used and sought to improve over time. Sometimes the term 'folkloristics' is used instead for the academic field.

What made 'folk-lore' an obvious source for the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North was the conviction that it was old — that is to say, that it had been in circulation since time immemorial and thus preserved the past, including the pre-Christian past. The fundamental underlying assumption was that aspects of the old religion could live on in new contexts. This notion of survivals is usually linked with the theories of the English anthropologist E. B. Tylor and his school.

> [Survivals are] processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved. (Tylor 1920 [1871]: 16)

Although Tylor articulated the concept, all scholars accepted and worked with something like it, going right back to Grimm and his notion of broken-down myth. According to this theory, survivals had no meaning in and of themselves, no particular contexts, but were just things that people kept saying or doing for no real reason other than force of habit. Needless to say, this concept could hardly survive the onset of functionalism in the social sciences, and it has vanished, at least as a theory. Note, however, that Tylor's evolutionist stance ('new state of society') could be overlooked, in which case survivals would simply be regarded as elements of tradition that originated in the past and persisted when their original context no longer existed.

Like nearly every folklorist of the nineteenth century, Thoms believed that folklore was vanishing and had to be 'rescued by timely exertion' (Merton 1846: 863). By this he meant that the materials had to be collected from their rude home in the rural countryside and brought into the world of educated people. In the early stages of the collection and study of folklore, the process was primarily through publication (like those of the Grimms' *Märchen* and legends, Faye's legends and so forth).[1] In recent times, folklorists have explored and clarified this process of 'textualization' (moving from oral performance to publication), but in the earliest Western European publications, what mattered was the published text. Although Vuk Karadžić identified singers from whom he collected in Serbia, as did some early ballad editors in Scotland, such as Scott and Jamieson, and some Russian publications were organized around informants, interest in the informant was unusual, and the context of collection or of performance went essentially untreated.

What we now call textualization was the subject of a public debate in mid-century Denmark that now goes by the charming name *folkevisestrid* ('ballad struggle' or 'ballad war') (Dal 1956: 66–79; Hustvedt 1930: 175–204; Petersen 1905). Denmark was unusual among European countries in that ballads had been published very early there, in the famous 'hundred-ballad' book (Wedel 1591). The Humanist scholar Peder Syv updated Wedel's edition with another hundred ballads a century or so later (Syv 1695). This collection was reprinted in 1739, 1764 and 1787, and was updated in a five-volume edition in 1812–14 (Abrahamson, Nyerup and Rahbek 1812–14) — the same years as the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. But as the Grimms' fairy-tale edition looked forward, the Danish ballad edition obviously looked back. In 1843, Svend Grundtvig, son of the famous theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig, announced

[1] On the practices of the Grimms and their implications, see Bauman and Briggs (2003: 197–225).

his intention (together with his tutor C. S. Ley, who in the end was a contributor to the project, not an editor) to issue a new and complete edition of the Danish ballads (Grundtvig and Ley 1843).

N. F. S. Grundtvig was probably the leading Danish intellectual of the middle nineteenth century (on Grundtvig, see Chapters 1.1 in this volume and 8.1 in Volume 1). Raised in a household in which the Old Norse myths and legends were valued, he studied Old Norse and even contributed a charmingly titled handbook of the mythology *for dannede mænd, der ei selv ere mytologer* ('for educated people who are not expert in mythology') (Grundtvig 1808), succeeded by a more philosophically oriented book about the topic (Grundtvig 1832), which went through several editions. Old Norse myth and religion thus clearly formed part of the atmosphere in which his son Svend grew up.

In a follow-up publication to the announcement of intention, Svend Grundtvig criticized the editorial principles of Abrahamson, Nyerup, and Rahbek for 'correcting' the texts, for privileging the aesthetic and for overlooking some manuscript evidence and nearly all evidence from oral tradition (Grundtvig 1843–44). In 1846 Samfundet til den danske literaturs fremme ('The society for the advancement of Danish literature') asked Grundtvig (still only twenty-two years old) to draw up a formal plan for a new ballad edition. In the printed plan (Grundtvig 1847), Grundtvig famously promised to deliver to the Danish people all there was of the ballad tradition, as it was. The plan called for the publication of all the versions of a given ballad, from early printed editions, from manuscripts and from oral traditions, using the original orthography, and of registering variant readings in an apparatus. All ballads were to be presented thus, each with an introductory headnote, the versions arranged more or less chronologically. Grundtvig also had a sample printed in 1847.

The ballad war ensued, fought in newspaper articles and pamphlets. Grundtvig's foremost opponent was Christian Molbech, an indefatigable lexicographer, historian and literary critic. His principal objection was that such an edition would be an unreadable mess, but in the end the war was fought over the principle of textualization: was the editor's responsibility primarily to document tradition or was it to satisfy the aesthetic demands of the reading public? Grundtvig enjoyed the public and private support of a number of public intellectuals, and the ballad war, though ferocious, was short. A real war intervened (the Schleswig Revolt of 1848), but in 1850 the *Samfund* asked Grundtvig to proceed, and in 1853 the first volume of *Danmarks gamle folkeviser* ('Denmark's Ancient Ballads') appeared. It remains a model edition; its principles were followed, for example, by Francis James Child (1825–96), the American collector of English and Scottish popular ballads (Child 1882–98).

Svend Grundtvig went on to a career at the University of Copenhagen and from 1869 was professor of Nordic philology. He issued a monograph on the older heroic poetry and an edition of the Poetic Edda, and he contributed to the contemporary debate on the origin of the eddic poems. Thus this founder of folklore study in Denmark, and of all subsequent international ballad scholarship, grappled with problems that are still current in the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North. Grundtvig was also, like Jacob Grimm, a scholar of folklore and of Old Norse studies; indeed, he argued that folklore was an inherent part of the field of Nordic philology (Piø 1971: 222–23). And well into the twentieth century, Nordic and Germanic philology provided the primary method and theoretical model for the investigation of pre-Christian Nordic religions. Grundtvig's headnotes to the Danish ballads have perhaps not received the attention they should have in the history of folklore scholarship, given that they anticipate the dominant method in folklore study of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the ballad war and principles of textualization probably had no direct effect on the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North, Grundtvig himself did, both through his subsequent influence on his successor in the ballad project, Axel Olrik, and for the principles of scholarship he set forth in the headnotes to the ballads. These principles came to be known, however, as the Finnish method, at first through efforts to understand the background of *Kalevala*.

Surely *Kalevala* was among the most famous folklore publications of the nineteenth century, and perhaps of all time (see also Chapter 2.2 above). In its canonical 1849 form, it comprised an epic stitched together by Elias Lönnrot (1802–84) out of songs from all over the Baltic Finnish speech area, including a number of verses by Lönnrot himself, and cast into a uniform language based on Karelian dialect. (There is a certain parallel here with the mythological texts of the Icelandic Middle Ages, in that these oral songs that have been 'textualized' refer to beings who probably at one time were deities; we know this because of a list of 'gods' from Häme and Karelia produced by the clergyman Mikael Agricola in 1551 and including many names found in the traditional poetry.) Lönnrot knew these songs because he and a number of others, at the time mostly students from the new university in Helsinki, had collected them from singers out in the countryside. In 1831, Lönnrot and other students founded the Finnish Literary Society (*Suomalaisen kirjalisuuden seura*; Lönnrot himself coined the term *kirjalisuus*, 'literature'). The Society's goal was to promote the collection of oral literature and to preserve it, and thus originated what is now the largest folklore archive in the world, currently housing around four million individual manuscript notes, around 16,000 hours of

audio recorded material, about 1110 hours of video tape and about 250,000 images. Although it contains some older manuscripts, the core of the original collection consisted of Lönnrot's notes from the many collecting journeys he undertook over the course of his life.

Addressing the large data set of *Kalevala* style poetry, Julius Krohn, professor of Finnish language and literature at the University of Helsinki, used a method similar to what Grundtvig had used on the Danish ballads and formulated the essence of what would be the dominant theory of folklore analysis in the first half of the twentieth century (Krohn 1883; see also Hautala 1969: 67–76; Pentikäinen 1971), especially as articulated by his son and successor at the University of Helsinki, Kaarle Krohn. Atlthough Julius thought of it as a 'regional-historic' method, it was subsequently to be known as the 'historic-geographic' method or often, too, as the Finnish method. When Kaarle Krohn delivered a series of lectures on the state of the art in Oslo in 1924 and 1925, the published result was simply called the 'folklore method', but the full title indeed implies a methodological school: *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode begründet von Julius Krohn und weitergeführt von nordischen Forschern* ('The folklore method founded by Julius Krohn and carried further by Nordic researchers') (Krohn 1926, trans. Krohn 1971). This method looks a lot like manuscript filiation, except that the numbers of comparanda are huge, and the goal is not only to construct an archetype (oral, not written) but also to date and localize that archetype and discuss its dissemination into the hundreds or thousands of variants recorded in archives. The object of investigation was the 'type'. In narrative the type would be a repeated plot, in the folk-tale arena familiar to all of us now, and to scholars in the nineteenth century, through names such as 'Cinderella' or 'Iron Henry', usually taken from the Grimms. All of the known recordings would be examples of the type, and the scholar's job was to date and localize a hypothetical archetype.

While from this vantage point it is clear that the historic-geographic method in folklore was simply a version of the comparative method that prevailed in numerous academic discourses, to Western folklorists it seemed unique and a tool of enormous power. One of its most important principles, and one that informed scholarship in studies of Nordic religion by those who practised it or were sympathetic to it, was the idea that folklore readily crossed borders, or to put it another way, that people readily borrowed folklore across borders. All extant recordings derive, according to this theory, from a distant archetype, and what got recorded may not be local at all — indeed, probably was not.[2]

[2] See Wilson (1976: 3–117) for a fascinating account of how Finnish folklorists kept moving the hypothetical original homeland and date of the epic traditions. Karelia, where the

No folklorist today would subscribe to this way of describing the relationship between expressions of tradition and their past; in effect, it regards all popular culture as a set of survivals. Instead, contemporary folklorists would say that all traditional culture is at the very least anchored in the local and contemporary, whatever its history.

The sheer amount of data finding its way into folklore collections posed a problem as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Kaarle Krohn, who used shorthand, was personally responsible for collecting some 18,000 items from oral tradition, about half of them folk-tales (Pentikäinen 1971: 21). Evald Tang Kristensen, who began collecting oral traditions in Jutland in 1867 and continued to do so over a long and productive lifetime, ended with over 33,000 items of tradition (Rockwell 1982: xii). It is hardly surprising that the next major public archive arose in Denmark, namely *Dansk folkemindesamling* ('The Danish Folklore Collection'). Founded in 1904, it was based first on Svend Grundtvig's collections but was augmented with (*inter alia*) the collections of Axel Olrik, H. F. Feilberg and Evald Tang Kristensen. The Finnish and Danish archives were, however, exceptional in being public assets: most collections were in private hands.

As scholars began to contemplate monographs using the historic-geographic method, they faced a very simple problem: locating and identifying all the records that belonged to the type they wished to investigate. Although Julius Krohn had worked with the Baltic-Finnish epic poems, by the early twentieth century folklorists were most interested in tales (indeed, about half of what Kaarle Krohn collected fell into this category), perhaps because these were so widespread all over the world and appeared to be so similar wherever they were recorded. Three folklorists established an organization to facilitate access, create catalogues and publish scholarly works (Krohn 1910: 15–16): the *Folkloristischer Forscherbund* ('Organization of Folklore Scholars') (also, cleverly, *Folklore Fellows* and *Féderation des Folkloristes* ('Folklorists' Federation'), allowing use of the alliterative tag *FF* in three international languages). These scholars were Kaarle Krohn, Johannes Bolte, who was at work on a vast annotation of the Grimms' *Märchen*, and Axel Olrik.

Olrik had studied with and been mentored by Svend Grundtvig, and he succeeded Grundtvig as the editor of *Danmarks gamle folkeviser* in 1888. Olrik was a scholar of prodigious scope who made important contributions both to Danish and international folklore studies and to the study of Old Norse heroic

traditions were most strongly represented and most assiduously recorded, was never a candidate for the homeland.

poetry and mythology. In his very first scholarly publication, a review published in 1883, he asserted the value of the Jutlandic legends that Evald Tang Kristensen was documenting:

> A complete presentation of the body of legends would be a whole textbook on ancient Scandinavian mythology. And in this lies the major importance of folk legends: our knowledge of the belief of our forefathers, which is otherwise so sparse and so pale with age, gains colour and form from the hundreds and thousands of legends which can still be salvaged from the mouths of the people. (Quoted in Holbek 1971: 272; Holbek's translation)

Certainly today's folklorists would reject this assertion, since the major importance of folk legends is surely as a window into the lives of the tradition bearers themselves, but it is characteristic of the time. Olrik acted on it in numerous publications, from his study of the Wild Hunt (Olrik 1901), or of Gefjon (Olrik 1910b), through the numerous contributions to the debate on Loki (Olrik 1908, 1909, 1911). It also to some degree informs his infusion of Sámi materials into the debate on Old Scandinavian religion (Olrik 1905a, 1905b, 1906, 1910c), since the Sámi materials he used were for the most part recently collected.

One of Olrik's principal contributions to the scholarship on the pre-Christian myths and religions of the North was his study of Ragnarök, published in Danish in two parts (Olrik 1902 and 1914) that were gathered together in the later German version (Olrik 1922; it is worth pointing out how the word *Sagen* ('legends') in the German title relates the work to the discourse of folklore). Olrik's method is wholly consonant with the folkloristic methods of the time; he adduces eschatological parallels primarily from Ireland, Persia, the Caucasus, as well as from Christian legends, and offers these parallels as the origin of many of the motifs in the recorded Scandinavian versions; for example, the sea sinking into the earth is Celtic, *fimbulvetr* ('mighty winter') is Persian and so forth. The underlying theoretical premise, as in folklore research of the same era, is that oral materials easily crossed boundaries and were assimilated in the tradition under investigation. Olrik's study is hardly mentioned these days, just as the older tale-type studies have given way to other sorts of analysis within folkloristics. It was, however, quite influential for many years (see, for example, de Vries 1970: II, 398–400). Less well remembered but also part of the older debate on Ragnarök was the study of Will-Erich Peuckert (1935), known primarily as an expert on German legends, and the monograph on Loki by the Swedish folklorist Hilding Celander (1910), who also drew in recent materials. An exchange between him and Olrik ensued in the pages of Olrik's journal, *Danske studier* ('Danish Studies').

Olrik's major research interest was Old Norse tradition. His dissertation was on the heroic legends in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (Olrik 1892), and he also treated Denmark's heroic legends in two subsequent volumes (Olrik 1903 and 1910a). Johannes Bolte worked primarily on *Märchen*, but he also did research on medieval topics. Kaarle Krohn, by contrast, was limited to more recent materials insofar as his research agenda focused on Finland. However, he too contributed to the discussion on Scandinavian mythology and Old Norse religion. One finds no significant methodological differences between these studies and the so-called Finnish method he was instrumental in articulating and exploiting.[3] A convention he employed in two of his titles exemplifies perfectly the theoretical premises of the method, namely use of the signs < and > to indicate derivation (Krohn 1904 and 1905). He used both in his 1905 article on Baldr and Lemminkäinen; each narrative, he argues, derives from the story of the passion of Christ. A similar premise lay behind his study of Naglfar and some Finnish parallels, for which Krohn again argues a common source rather than influence of one tradition on the other (Krohn 1912). When Krohn did see influence, it was almost always from Germanic onto neighbouring Finno-Ugric traditions, as in the 1904 article. In later programmatic articles, Krohn explored the consequences of this view and argued that because the borrowings must have occurred long ago, the presence of features from Germanic religion in Sámi or Finnish tradition certified the age of the features in question (Krohn 1906, 1909, 1930). Even if some elements of Germanic religion were old, however, Krohn inclined to the view (implicitly imposed by his methodology) that most of it derived from elsewhere, often medieval Christian legend (Krohn 1905 and 1911). This conception drove his systematic treatment of Scandinavian mythology (Krohn 1922).

The polymath American medievalist and folklorist Alexander Haggerty Krappe sought to yoke the historic-geographic method to a 'science' of folklore (Krappe 1930; see also Burson 1982). A follower also of Tyler and Frazer, Krappe wrote extensively about supposed survivals in the pre-Christian myth and religion of the North, often, frequently, of ancient ritual (Krappe 1928–29; 1933–34) or of conceptions of the divine twins (Krappe 1931–32; 1932; 1933a); his study of the Baldr myth employs both notions (Krappe 1923). In his *Études de mythologie et de folklore germanique* (1928), Krappe derived Týr

[3] Krohn's study (1889) of the tale of the bear and the fox was the first significant application of the method to international folk-tales; the early numbers of *FF Communications* are filled with such studies. Krohn's student Antti Aarne compiled the first indices of international and Finnish tale types (Aarne 1910 and 1911), as well as the first general explication of the method (Aarne 1913).

from an original wolf-figure and postulated aspects of ritual associated with Óðinn and Þórr. His deep erudition also permitted him to postulate the origin of aspects of Scandinavian religion from classical, English and Celtic traditions (Krappe 1933b; 1934; 1937; 1940).

Little of what has been set forth in the preceding paragraphs has stood the test of time. The last effort to employ something like the same methodology was Anna Birgitta Rooth's monograph on Loki (Rooth 1961), although in other writings Rooth took up a somewhat critical stance toward various assumptions of the historic-geographic method. Here the essentially subtractive aspect of the methodology comes to the fore: if a given feature is found elsewhere, that is where it originated. When Rooth is done, she is left with the spider (Swedish dialect *locke*).

The interest in tales and the idea that they moved easily from place to place naturally led scholars to wonder whether any folk-tales had 'migrated' into Scandinavian myth and religious narrative. As early as 1899, Friedrich von der Leyen postulated folk-tales as the source of various details and plot structures in the mythology of the Eddas, and these he sought to separate from older religious discourse. Identification of underlying folk-tale plots remains in the mainstream of the study of Scandinavian mythology and thus plays an important role in the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North.

The generally received history of folklore scholarship has it that the first successful challenge to the Finnish method originated in the writings of the Swedish folklorist C. W. von Sydow, who drew interest to the agency of persons involved in the folklore process and distinguished between active and passive bearers of tradition. A number of concepts introduced by von Sydow remain influential in folklore studies, such as the concept of the memorate, a first-hand account of a supernatural experience, or of the oicotype, a local variant of a type. Although his 1909 dissertation treated tales (von Sydow 1909), he had already published a treatment of the Master Builder story that remains useful for consideration of Snorri Sturluson's account of the building of the wall around Ásgarðr (von Sydow 1907–08), and his study of giants also remains useful (von Sydow 1919). He was, however, a child of his time insofar as he frequently argued Celtic — especially Irish — influence on Scandinavian (von Sydow 1910; 1920). This direction of influence has been a mainstream position in the field (see, for example, Egeler 2013 and Chapter 3.4 above); a rare exception was von der Leyen (1908), who sought to derive an Irish folk-tale from the Norse Útgarða-Loki story. Von Sydow also argued a folk-tale origin for an episode in the eddic poem *Hymiskviða* (von Sydow 1914).

Von Sydow spent most of his academic career at the University of Lund, where he overlapped for some years with Jöran Sahlgren. Sahlgren is justly famous as the founding father of Swedish place-name research, and within that field he argued consistently and vociferously against theophoric interpretations, virtually putting in place a ban against such studies in Sweden for decades. His position against a possible ritual origin of *Skírnismál* was equally strong (see, for example, Sahlgren 1927–28), and here he inclined toward an origin in folktale. Sahlgren's place-name research relied in part on a deep knowledge of the conceptual world of the rural population — that is, with folklore, and many of his writings contributed directly to folklore research in Sweden and remain important in that discourse (e.g., Sahlgren 1915; 1935; 1940–41). Sahlgren returned to Uppsala in 1930 and formed an important part of the scholarly milieu there.

Within that milieu, in 1935 Dag Strömbäck defended his doctoral dissertation, the still important book on *seiðr* ('magic, sorcery') (Strömbäck 1935). Strömbäck contributed numerous other works on Old Norse texts that are still widely read, including many that, like *Sejd*, treat subjects relating to Nordic myth and religion (e.g., Strömbäck 1928a; 1928b; 1929; 1942; 1948; 1949; 1952; 1959; 1975a; 1975b). However, he was professor of European and Comparative Folklore at Uppsala for many years, and many of his publications do not use Old Norse materials; indeed, his more or less strictly folkloristic writings fill an entire posthumous volume (Strömbäck 1989). Although Strömbäck considered himself a member of the research school of Moltke Moe and Axel Olrik, paradigms of folklore research had changed since their day. To be sure, Strömbäck was interested in the movement of tales across boundaries (see, for example, Strömbäck 1945), and he could locate traces of older ritual in more recent materials (Strömbäck 1949), but his major emphasis was on legends and folk belief, and he therefore focused on what tales actually said and on what people might actually have believed, rather than on the origins of the tales and survivals they may have contained. In folklore studies this represented the beginning of the so-called performance turn, that is, an emphasis on folklore as the very moment when a tale is told, a song is sung, a behaviour is carried out. There may be a parallel there with 'new philology' in its return to the artefact and its social context. Strömbäck's work, and that of other folklorists who have worked in his tradition within Old Norse studies, remains fresh and current for that reason.

In this chapter I have treated the impact of folklore scholarship and folklorists on the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North, focusing on a few major figures who exemplify trends within the field of folklore. What emerges

most clearly is that as folkloristic paradigms have shifted, scholars with folklore training who work on Nordic religions have shifted with them, with varying results for their work in that field. If a chapter like this one is written toward the end of this century or the beginning of the next, it will no doubt assess the importance of the performance turn, both as regards our view of the textual artefacts available to us and of the oral tradition that no doubt lay behind them.

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Part 4

The Influence of Old Norse Myth on Music in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

4.1 – Richard Wagner, the *Ring* and its Influence

Edward R. Haymes

Cultural and Political Background to the Ring

Richard Wagner (1813–83) transformed the public conception of the pre-Christian religions of the North in a manner that dwarfed the work of scholars and even popular writers, mainly in his opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ('The Ring of the Nibelung').[1] Since the publication of the texts in 1863, practically every popular treatment of the pre-Christian religions, particularly those in Germany, was Wagnerian in some way or other. If one asks an educated German today about the Nibelung legend, the legend of Siegfried, the result will include some part of Wagner's version, whether the informant is a 'Wagnerian' or not. Richard Wagner's changes to the pre-Christian religions of the North have become part of popular culture.

German nationalism had come in waves over the years between the pre-Romantics of the eighteenth century and the eventual foundation of a German state under Prussian hegemony in 1871. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the most important periods were probably the Romantic nationalism during the Napoleonic wars before 1815, then the rise of German nationalism following the Vienna Congress of 1815, reaching its peak in the 1830s

[1] All quotations from *Der Ring* are from Spencer (1993).

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in the 'Young Germany' movement and finally the uprising that led to the Constitutional Convention in St Paul's Church in Frankfurt during 1848 (Rapport 2008). The rejection of that constitution by the Prussian king led immediately to the uprisings in Dresden in the spring of 1849, in which Wagner took part and which led to his being exiled from Germany for more than a decade. Germany would not be united until 1871, and then under a compromise that would have satisfied none of the revolutionaries of 1848. We will return to these concerns of nationalism later.

An Englishman named Sir William Jones, serving in India, observed that Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, shared many characteristics with Latin and Greek. He communicated these findings in 1786 (see further Chapter 7.1 of Volume I of this study and Chapter 3.3 in this volume). A few years later exploration of Indo-European moved to Germany (where it was called Indo-Germanic until after World War II). It was supported in publications by Friedrich Schlegel (1808) and Franz Bopp (1816). The linguistic observations leading to these publications suggested that European languages were aligned with those of parts of Asia. Germanists and historians of these periods saw all of the peoples speaking Germanic languages as belonging to the German 'race', and they saw Old Norse as belonging to the Germanic past. Jacob Grimm published a grammar of the Germanic languages, the first edition of which came out in 1819 (Lockwood 1969: 22–23). Along with the language, the mythology of the North was adopted as one of the contributors to German belief systems before Christianity. Although he did his best to separate Norse and German contributions, Jacob Grimm included the Norse in his later survey of German mythology.

Richard Wagner was an ardent nationalist, as were many of the Germans of his generation. Most educated Germans of that period had been exposed to a classical education, so it was a matter of pride that the Germanic languages had come to be seen as every bit as old as the ancestors of Latin and Greek. Even as solid an academic as Jacob Grimm expressed these ideas in many of his writings. In the early part of the nineteenth century (after the Vienna Congress of 1815), when the German states that had been united in their war against Napoleon were divided up again under the absolutist administration of petty nobles, this feeling was particularly strong. The new German nationalism was a leftist concern, a concern against the existing order, and many of its adherents had very advanced ideas. Wagner departed somewhat from the democratic ideals of his contemporaries in that he wanted the king to be the first among equals, the highest democrat, but he shared the notion that a revolution was necessary (Wagner 1911: XII, 218–27). Wagner hoped that the Dresden uprising in May

of 1849 would be the spark that lit the revolutionary fuse. After the uprising failed in both its goals, to make Saxony free of rule by petty nobles and to set Germany afire with revolutionary fervor, Wagner fled with a price on his head, still hoping that revolution was possible.

Wagner had already posited the existence of a pre-Christian Germanic religious substratum in his *Lohengrin* (the text of which was written in 1845) in which he had the villainess Ortrud call upon the pagan gods (Wodan and Freia) in Christian Antwerp. Her invocation calls forth the ultimately successful magic, which leads Elsa to ask the forbidden question of Lohengrin and thus ultimately bring down the Christian Elsa and the Grail representative Lohengrin. Ortrud's villainy is based on a religion derived from her father Radbod, the king of Frisia. Wagner, who was generally very interested in historical reliability, created a daughter for an actual king of Frisia who could not have been her father, since he died in 719, and the action of the opera does not take place until more than two hundred years later. Interestingly her gods seem turned against German unity, represented by Henry the Fowler and his fight against the Magyars (Wagner 1911: 11, 65–114). Wagner's medieval sources were thoroughly Christian and none had any reference to paganism. Both Ortrud and her paganism were inventions of the composer.

Wagner derived his ideas about Germanic pre-Christian religions largely from Jacob Grimm, whose *Deutsche Mythologie* ('German Mythology') had been published in 1835 and already advanced to a second edition (which Wagner owned) in 1844. Wagner added the notions developed in that book to those he developed in wide reading in virtually everything that had been published on the Nibelungs and the Germanic gods by the time he wrote his first draft of the Nibelung legend (October 1848). He had assembled a considerable library in Dresden, but it was given as surety for a loan at the time of his flight in May of 1849 to his brother-in-law, a member of the publishing firm of Brockhaus. The library stayed intact in the cellar of the firm Brockhaus in Leipzig until it was transferred after World War II to the company's new home in Wiesbaden. Curt von Westernhagen published a monograph on the Dresden library in 1966 which enumerated the books there.

Wagner's personal library included many of the books that were important in the development of his Nibelung legend. Additionally, in 1856 Wagner wrote to Franz Müller, who was writing a guide for the *Ring*, outlining his sources. The relevant portions of this letter are available in English in a book by Elizabeth Magee (1990: 18–19). In this list he cites 'Edda', which has confused scholars since then, but was seen at that time simply as a citation of two medieval Icelandic texts, the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson and the Poetic Edda. Both

of the translations in Wagner's Dresden library, those by Rühs and by Majer, contained parts of both Eddas, so Wagner probably saw them as a single work. None of the sources from Wagner's own hand mentions Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, but the poet was a correspondent of the Leipzig uncle, Adolf Wagner, with whom the young Richard Wagner spent much time, and the similarities between Fouqué's drama *Sigurd der Schlangentödter* ('Sigurd the Serpent-Killer') (1808) and *Siegfried* are simply too great to ignore. Magee (1990) traced Wagner's borrowings from the Royal Library in Dresden and drew up a fairly complete list of influences, admitted and unadmitted, for his *Ring*.

The thirteenth-century Middle High German epic poem *Das Nibelungenlied* (Bartsch and de Boor 1988) was discovered in 1755 after more than two hundred years in obscurity and partially published by Johann Jacob Bodmer already in 1757. It was published in its entirety in 1782, although that edition created little interest. It had to wait for the combination of nationalism and medievalism that marked the first decades of the nineteenth century, the epoch of the Napoleonic wars (Ehrismann 1975). Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen published a version that was halfway between an edition and a translation in 1807 and a more scholarly edition in 1810. Wagner seems to have used the edition by Lachmann (1826) along with various translations as his source. The *Nibelungenlied* was thoroughly Christian in its point of view and even viewed heathens as being merely those who sang the mass differently (Bartsch and de Boor 1988: 291, st. 1851). The Christians of the thirteenth century could not imagine a religious body that did not have an equivalent of the mass. Attila (Etzel) and his fellow Huns are represented as the only heathens in the poem.

The *Nibelungenlied* was not Wagner's main source for the *Ring*, but it was the main source for those who wanted a medieval source uncoloured by the Norse versions (see the outline of the poem's plot in Appendix A). We do not know when the Nibelung legend acquired a heathen colouring. The actors in the historical events that were incorporated into it were, for the most part, Christian. The Nibelung legend at some time in its transmission was heathenized in the North. It was retold there so that the Germanic gods, at least those who were worshipped in Iceland and the rest of Scandinavia, played a role. When we look at the written records from the thirteenth century in Iceland and Norway, we have to keep in mind that the authors were Christian, looking back on a heathen past. We have no way of separating the elements that were added to make the heathen past lead into Christianity from those which had a genuine connection to pre-Christian religions.

In the extant Old Icelandic versions, the Nibelung legend is embedded in myths that assume a pre-Christian world picture, with the involvement

of the Nordic gods, especially Óðinn, in the lives of the narrative's protagonists. Versions of the legends are present in three medieval Icelandic vernacular works: the *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (Snorri's *Edda*) (generally dated in the 1220s) and the poems of the so-called Poetic Edda (the main manuscript dated to *c*. 1270) along with *Völsunga saga* ('The Saga of the Volsungs', preserved in a unique medieval manuscript of *c.* 1400).[2] It was also referred to in other texts, but these were the only works to contain the whole legend. Some of these texts became a part of German consciousness in the adaptation by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1808) of the Latin history of Norway by Torfaeus (1711). Torfaeus included virtually the whole of *Völsunga saga* in his Latin history. The Old Icelandic saga was not published until 1737 (Björner). This, along with the translations from the Old Norse by Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen (1813; 1814–28), became the basis for Germans' adoption of the Norse version of the legend as part of their heritage (Haymes 2012). The later translations by Ludwig Ettmüller (1830, 1837) and Karl Simrock (1851) added to the stock of Icelandic documents available, but they did not change the German consciousness, although they may have changed *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Virtually all retellings of the Nibelung legend written in Germany after 1815 were built as much on the Norse versions as on the German *Nibelungenlied*.

Between his work on *Lohengrin* (completed during the spring of 1848) and the beginnings of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in October of 1848 Wagner developed his concept (which may have been simmering in his mind for some time) of a German myth that would unite the Germans the way Greek myth, expressed in drama, had united the Athenians. He achieved this by mixing elements of the old Germanic religion as described by Jacob Grimm and others with his idiosyncratic concept of Greek drama and his own dramatic and philosophical sense. He derived his notion of Greek drama as a central force in the formation of the ideal Greek democracy from snippets he had gained through his education and the work of Johann Gustav Droysen (1832). He expressed several times in his writings the central place of drama in the community of ancient Athens and his desire that a mythological drama could become the centre of an idealized German *polis* (Meier 2005). Several classical scholars have investigated the use of Greek drama in the shaping of the *Ring* and have emphasized different aspects, but all reach the conclusion that the use of Greek mythology

[2] Von See (1994) locates the origin of *Völsunga saga* in Norway, but I see no reason to disagree with those who locate the saga in Iceland. There is only one medieval manuscript in any case, and that is about one hundred years after the supposed writing of the saga. It is Icelandic.

in Wagner's thinking was pervasive (Ewans 1983; Buller 2001; Lee 2003). The idea of the curse, the central role of Wotan, the tragic role of heroes, all have their roots in Greek drama, particularly Aeschylus, as much as in Germanic mythology of the North. The Poetic Edda, Snorri's *Edda* and *Völsunga saga* all contain references to the gods being involved with human events, but these are not as pervasive as those of Greek drama and its use of gods and goddesses as shapers of human destiny. In the *Ring* Wagner makes use of both models. The *Ring*, being presented in four operas, is frequently referred to as a tetralogy, but it was always referred to by its composer as a trilogy preceded by a preliminary evening. He built other aspects of his drama on what he considered to be Greek concepts, but in the following I will concentrate on those aspects of his work that seem based on the pre-Christian religions of the North.

Wagner built his Nibelung drama on his own conception of Germanic mythology and Greek tragedy with the expectation that a theatre could be the new central point of the idealized German state that he imagined. This motivated him throughout his mature life, particularly after the failed uprising in Dresden in May 1849, and led ultimately to the construction of the Festspielhaus ('Festival Theatre') in Bayreuth, which opened with the *Ring* in 1876. He imagined the festival theatre as a place where ordinary Germans would meet and the drama as the central element of the new religion he saw forming after the revolution. One of the characteristics of this theatre was that entrance was to be free and open to all. As it turned out, this could never be the case, but he clung to this notion throughout his life (Spotts 1994).

He expressed the function of myth in binding together the German peoples in an essay which was probably begun before he sketched his concept of the Nibelung myth (*Der Nibelungen-Mythus: Als Entwurf zu einem Drama* ('The Nibelung-Myth: As Sketch for a Drama'), Wagner 1911: II, 156–66), but which was revised before its eventual publication in the autumn of 1849 after Wagner had been driven from Dresden and into exile (Wilberg 1996). This essay, *Die Wibelungen: Weltgeschichte aus der Sage* ('The Wibelungs: World History from Legend', Wagner 1911: II, 115–55), sees the Nibelung legend as the central feature of German history. In this essay Wagner writes about the Germans as coming (presumably as a group) from the Caucasus via Troy. Already in the Caucasian homeland, the ancestors of the Germans had both a natural religion, based on light and dark (night and day, winter and summer) and a patriarchal system in which the father was both teacher and priest. Later the king took over these roles.

Wagner worked very hard to make the Frankish kings of the early Middle Ages and the Stauffen emperors of the High Middle Ages the receptacles for the people's veneration. This veneration was connected in his mind with the

winning of the hoard from the dragon of darkness. Each king became a new Siegfried, the winner of the hoard. This sequence came to an end with the death of Konradin in the thirteenth century (1268). Wagner was already in 1848 combining the Siegfried legend with the ancient religion of the North to form a new/old mythology for the Germans. In this essay, the Nibelungs are seen as the royal dynasty of the Franks, that is, they have gained the treasure of the Nibelungs through Siegfried's action of killing the dragon of darkness. The owners of the treasure are seen as Nibelungs.

Before being exiled from Dresden, Wagner sketched a Nibelung myth that includes the gods, giants and dwarves ('Der Nibelungen-Mythus als Entwurf zu einem Drama', Wagner 1911: II, 156–66; Haymes 2010: 44–59) that populate his *Ring*, but they do not show up very much in the opera text *Siegfrieds Tod* ('Siegfried's Death') (1848) (*Siegfrieds Tod*, Wagner 1911: II, 167–228; Haymes 2010: 66–158). *Siegfrieds Tod* is not *Götterdämmerung* ('The Twilight of the Gods'), but it shares many scenes with the later drama (see Appendix B for a synopsis). Wagner changed the myth offered in both the medieval texts and the early nineteenth century resumés to make it both more compact and more dramatically effective. He set out to portray the gods of ancient Germany in a more positive light (and as part of Germanic nationalism) in his drama than he had done in *Lohengrin*.

Many aspects of the Nibelung myth of 1848 found their way into the eventual *Ring* cycle. Both Wotan (Old Norse Óðinn) and Brünnhilde (Old Norse Brynhildr) play a major role in this version of the myth. Other gods and goddesses of the pre-Christian North show up, but their roles are so transformed that no adherent of the old religions would recognize them, although Wagner tried to include aspects of their cults as he saw them. Thus Fricka's (Old Norse Frigg) chariot was pulled by a pair of rams; Donner (Old Norse Þórr) wields his hammer against giants and so on. In *Siegfrieds Tod* (1848), in a passage that was transferred unchanged into *Götterdämmerung*, Hagen calls on Gunther's men to sacrifice to the gods. He is specific about what gods receive which sacrifice: Wotan should receive 'strong steers'; Froh (Old Norse Freyr) receives a wild boar, Donner a goat, Fricka sheep, so that the gods would give a 'good marriage.'

During the five years between the completion of *Lohengrin* and the beginning of the music for *Das Rheingold* ('The Gold of the Rhine'), Wagner wrote no useable music, but much prose and poetry. In the first months of exile he wrote *Die Kunst und die Revolution* ('Art and the Revolution', Wagner 1911: III, 1–41) and *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* ('The Artwork of the Future', Wagner 1911: III, 42–178). Other works, including *Oper und Drama* ('Opera and Drama', Wagner 1911: III, 222–325; IV, 1–229), were written to explore

other aspects of music in general and opera in particular. *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* ('A Communication to my Friends', Wagner 1911: IV, 230–345) was written, among other things, to justify his shift from historical to mythical opera. In 1850, he published (under a pseudonym) the anti-Semitic screed, *Das Judentum in der Musik* ('Jewishness in Music', Wagner 1911: V, 66–86) that has tarnished his name for many, particularly after the Holocaust. He republished that article as a small book under his own name in 1869. He also expanded the single opera *Siegfrieds Tod* by showing the hero's earlier adventures in *Der junge Siegfried* ('Young Siegfried') on the stage and then expanded the double evening to four by writing the texts to *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* ('The Valkyrie'), all of which were published privately for his friends in 1853.[3]

In the revised *Ring* cycle the gods play a major role, but one that diminishes as the cycle goes on. In *Das Rheingold* there are no human beings at all, and in *Götterdämmerung* the gods have withdrawn to Valhalla, leaving the world mainly to humans. The widespread notion that Wagner wrote his *Ring* cycle in reverse is true, but only for the text that was finally published in 1863 for the public at large. The music, which was not completed until November of 1874, was written in the order it is normally performed. Wagner worked on the music for *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* (which he completed) and the first two acts of *Siegfried* between 1854 and 1856 when he interrupted the work on the *Ring* for twelve years to compose *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. He returned to work on the *Ring* in 1868 and those with a strong sense of style can hear the difference between the second and third acts of *Siegfried*, which marked his return to the giant project. He completed the last notes of *Götterdämmerung* in November of 1874 in Bayreuth.

The Plot of the Ring

The plot of *The Ring of the Nibelung* revolves around a magic ring that grants its owner the power to rule the world. It was forged by the Nibelung dwarf, Alberich, from gold he stole from the Rhine Daughters. Alberich gained the ring by an act of giving up love. The gods have to pay for a castle (Valhalla), which was built by the giants Fasolt and Fafner, who now demand payment. They were originally promised Freia, the keeper of the Golden Apples of Youth, and Fasolt then managed to fall in love with her. The giants agree to substitute

[3] Two copies of this printing are in the Morgan Library in New York City. One copy preserves Wagner's notes and respellings for the 1863 printing.

the gold for Freia. With the assistance of the demigod Loge, Wotan, the head of the gods, steals the ring, but he is forced by the Earth Mother figure Erda to give it up to pay for Valhalla. Fasolt is killed by Fafner. Wotan schemes to regain the ring, which he is unable to steal. His grandson Siegfried, with no help from Wotan, wins the ring by killing Fafner (as the latter had killed Fasolt). Siegfried falls in love with Brünnhilde, the daughter of Wotan and Erda, who was cast out of Valhalla for disobedience. On the way to visit Brünnhilde, Siegfried shatters the spear from which the gods derived their power. He manages to overcome Brünnhilde's initial resistance and becomes her lover/husband. In *Götterdämmerung* we find the Norns (the Germanic goddesses of fate) weaving the rope in which are contained men's destinies. The rope breaks and the Norns are deprived of their eternal vision. Siegfried gives Brünnhilde the ring. Hagen laments that Gunther and Gutrune are still unmarried. Siegfried arrives and is immediately given a draught of forgetfulness, which causes him to forget Brünnhilde. He swears blood-brotherhood with Gunther. Brünnhilde receives a visit from Waltraute who tells her of Wotan's woe that she cannot bring herself to give up the ring. She reacts in shock that he would not realize that the ring was Siegfried's love token. Waltraute leaves and Siegfried enters in Gunther's shape. He takes the ring as a symbol of his marriage to her (as Gunther). Alberich speaks in a dream to Hagen, and urges him to be true. Hagen calls the vassals and tells them to celebrate the coming nuptials of Gunther. Gunther shows up with Brünnhilde. She sees the ring on Siegfried's hand and realizes that she has been tricked. They swear an oath on the weapons that should be used to kill them. She joins Hagen and Gunther in a vengeance trio, which is followed by an orchestral interlude in which the noise of the wedding is drowned out by the music that is used to identify Hagen. The Rhine Daughters seek to exchange the ring for Siegfried's life, but he throws his life away. He is joined by the other Burgundians including Gunther and Hagen. He regales them with tales of his 'young days.' He tells of Brünnhilde, but Hagen runs him through with a spear from behind and leaves. His dying words are for Brünnhilde. There is a brief scene for Gutrune but she is interrupted by Hagen. Brünnhilde enters and calls for calm. Hagen has the last words, as he lunges after the ring and is drowned by the Rhine Daughters.

Names of the Protagonists

Wagner generally used the German forms of the names of his protagonists, derived largely from Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, although he changed a number of them as he went along. His most important name change was for

the highest god, known in the North as Óðinn. Grimm mentioned the South German form Wuotan and the North German Wodan, which Wagner used for a while (including in *Lohengrin* and in the 1853 version of the *Ring*), but then he combined the two forms to produce Wotan, a form which has been adopted widely, even by those not really influenced by Wagner. Loge is a combination of Loki and *logi*, an Old Norse word meaning 'flame'. Wagner put the two together to make Loge both a trickster and a god of fire. He uses the latter attribute at the end of *Die Walküre* and at the end of *Götterdämmerung*. The distinction between Æsir and Vanir, the two races of Norse gods, has been erased. Freia (Freyja) has become a sister to Fricka (Frigg), and the gods Freyr and Þórr have become her brothers, renamed Froh and Donner. Wotan has children with Erda (Brünnhilde); with the mother(s) of the valkyries (other than Brünnhilde); and the human mother of Sieglinde and Siegmund, but none with Fricka. Erda is a complicated case: she appears quite unexpectedly in *Das Rheingold*, where she announces the end of the gods, and she seems to combine elements of an earth goddess and the sibyl of *Völuspá*, the first and probably greatest of the poems of the Poetic Edda, and may also be influenced by the *völva* of *Baldrs Draumar*.[4] Wagner's reference to her as 'Wala' seems to be derived from early nineteenth-century reconstructions of the nominative case of *Völuspá's* speaker as Vala, although Grimm and others had correctly identified the speaker as a *völva*. Modern translations speak of 'The Seeress's Prophecy.'

The parents of Siegfried are named from the *Nibelungenlied* where they bear the names Sigemunt and Sigelint. Wagner respelled those names in order to make their etymologies, as he understood them, clear. Thus Sigemunt became Siegmund; Sigelint became Sieglinde to make the derivation from *sieg* ('victory') as clear as it had always been for Siegfried. Brynhildr (or Prünhilt in the *Nibelungenlied*) became Brünnhilde to make the name's derivation from *brynne* or upper body armour clearer. While the name 'Alberich' is derived from the *Nibelungenlied*, the name 'Mímir' only appears in *Þiðreks saga af Bern* as the name of the smith who accepted Sigurðr sveinn ('Sigurd the boy') as his apprentice. Wagner knew all of the possible names for the smith who raised Sigurðr (and included them in the Nibelung myth; Haymes 2010: 44–45) and chose this one, changed to Mime. The daughter of Gibich who leads Siegfried astray is called 'Gudrune' in *Siegfrieds Tod* and 'Gutrune' in the final form of *Götterdämmerung*. The names of the Valkyries are Wagner's invention, as are the names of the Rhine Daughters.

[4] On Erda and her significance as the Romantic Earth Mother, possessor of the wisdom of the primeval world, see Lönnroth (1995: 38–41).

Figure 4.1.1: Brünnhilde as Walküre. From Rackham 1979.
Reproduced with permission from Dover Publications, New York.

Figure 4.1.2: Donner just before he collects the clouds to strike his thunderbolts.
From Rackham 1979. Reproduced with permission from Dover Publications, New York.

Wagner's Mythic Innovations

Richard Wagner saw nothing wrong with changing the Nibelung legend to suit his own ends. The opening scene of *Das Rheingold*, for example, has no parallel in the Norse versions of the story. Even if we equate Alberich with Andvari, the earliest owner of the ring in the various Norse versions, the opening scene, with Alberich's attempted seduction of each of the Rhine Daughters in turn and its conclusion in his theft of the gold from the depths of the Rhine, has no parallel in the Norse versions of the legend. In this first scene, Alberich learns of the power of the gold from the Rhine Daughters if one only renounces love for it and forges it into a ring. The ring did not have this power in the Norse sources, and this power is never applied to the ring until Wagner recomposed the Nibelung legend for his cycle, which is simply called *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. A major theme of Wagner's *Ring* is the demonstration again and again that love can be sacrificed for power. The first scene of the cycle, in which Alberich is depicted cursing love, brings this theme to the fore immediately. This scene did not appear in Wagner's earliest version of the Nibelung legend from 1848.

We find Wagner fitting the theme of the construction of the castle, which in Snorri's *Edda* was an independent myth, into the story of Alberich and the ring. In Snorri's narrative (*SnE* 2005: 34–36), we find the gods offering not only the goddess Freia but also the sun and the moon if the giant and his horse could finish the castle on time. It was looking as if the giant would fulfill his side of the bargain when Loki managed to distract the horse, a stallion, by becoming a mare, while Þórr returned and killed the giant with Mjöllnir, his famous hammer. Loki became pregnant with the horse's foal and eventually gave birth to Sleipnir, the eight-legged steed of Óðinn. This was too good a story to escape Wagner's attention, but he recast the events to make the castle the gods' castle of Valhalla, and Loge the architect of the bargain, which he is then sent off to seek a way out of. In Wagner's version it was only Freia who was bargained for.

When Loge returns, the giants (Wagner has replaced the one in Snorri's telling of the story with two, Fasolt and Fafner) are already there, demanding Freia as payment. Loge sings a passionate song about 'woman's delights and worth' but slyly puts in that Alberich gave up love to gain treasure. The giants, Fafner in particular, are intrigued. They agree to take the dwarf's treasure in exchange for Freia. They take Freia to Riesenheim ('Giant land') to make sure that the gods give up the gold. In Nibelheim, the gods, Wotan and Loge, trick Alberich out of the gold. Loge keeps the magic helmet Tarnhelm, and Wotan seizes the ring. Alberich places a curse on the ring. The giants return with Freia.

The gold is measured by the giants setting up poles to reflect Freia's body, but her hair is not hidden by the gold, and Loge has to give up the Tarnhelm for it. Fasolt can still see an eye in spite of the gold that is heaped up before her. The story in the Icelandic sources has a whisker of the otter's pelt (which the Æsir had to cover with gold in order to ransom themselves) sticking out, requiring Óðinn to give up the ring, which he does without demur. Wagner builds a whole episode out of this small point. Wotan refuses to give up the Ring, and it looks as though the whole deal will fall through because of his intransigence, but Erda appears and tells him he must give up the ring to save the gods. Wotan transfers his lust for the ring to this strange woman and gives up the ring. Loge calls to Fasolt to reach for the ring. Instead of having Fafner kill his father, as he does in the Icelandic versions of the Nibelung story, he kills his brother, and Wotan realizes the power of the curse.

Finally, the gods enter Valhalla on a rainbow bridge called into being by Froh. The Rhine Daughters sing from below about the loss of the gold. Loge comments that the gods are hurrying to their end and sarcastically invites the Rhine Daughters to sun themselves in the gods' new glory if their gold is not there to provide them with light. The gods march in pomp to the castle of Valhalla, leaving Loge behind.

The only extended narration of the Sigmund legend in the Middle Ages occurs in *Völsunga saga*, a saga which survives in only one medieval Icelandic manuscript and there as a prelude to the story of Ragnarr loðbrók (see McTurk 1991).[5] Wagner's *Die Walküre* is built very loosely on the version there. Siegmund calls himself Wehwalt ('Keeper of Woe'), a name that is the composer's invention. He identifies himself with the Wölfings who played an important role in the various versions of the myth preceding Wagner's. Probably borrowed from *Völsunga saga* is the period of time when Sigmund and his son Sinfjötli run around arousing enmity as werewolves. Wagner changed this episode to have Siegmund wandering with his father, Wälse (Wotan in disguise), garnering enmity: *Immer doch war ich geächtet* ('Ever was I treated as an outcast'). Perhaps the greatest change in Wagner's conception concerns the role of incest. In the saga, Sigmund does not know that he is committing incest since his sister has exchanged appearances with a female magician, a *seiðkona*, but in the opera Siegmund knows at the end of the act that his beloved is none other than his long-lost twin sister.

[5] I have chosen to ignore the passage in the Old English poem *Beowulf* involving Sigemund since it seems to belong to a different branch of the legend, in which many of the deeds involving Sigurðr are assigned to him.

Figure 4.1.3: The goddess Fricka in her chariot drawn by rams, probably just before her confrontation with Wotan. From Rackham 1979. Reproduced with permission from Dover Publications, New York.

Figure 4.1.4: Siegfried has just finished forging the sword. Mime is seen in the background. From Rackham 1979. Reproduced with permission from Dover Publications, New York.

Incest and adultery are the charges Fricka brings against Wotan in her pivotal scene in the second act. She has been called upon by Hunding (Sieglinde's husband) to protect his marriage, but the incest seems to spring from her own observation. Wotan, who is the father of the twins (Sieglinde and Siegmund) in Wagner's version, tries to defend Siegmund, but he is unable to stand up to the most important charge: that the gods would lose their power if he were allowed to live. The power-hungry Wotan can only give in at that point. There is no close Norse parallel to this scene, but the relationship between Fricka and Wotan seems to have gained a great deal from scenes between Hera and Zeus.

The scene between Brünnhilde and Siegmund has nothing corresponding to it in the Nibelung corpus, and it is lacking in the retelling of the Nibelung myth that is used to structure *Siegfrieds Tod*. It may, however, be derived from the Helgi poems in Simrock's translation of the Poetic Edda, which did not appear until 1851 (after *Siegfrieds Tod* was written). There the hero is not Sigmund but another of Sigmund's sons, Helgi. The Edda poems involve a conversation between a hero and a valkyrie, a reference to the heroes in Valhalla and a few other details that find their way into the dialogue between Brünnhilde and Siegmund. The shattering of Siegmund's sword by Wotan is told in *Völsunga saga*, but it is at a far different point in his career than it is in *Die Walküre*. It shows that the luck, which has been associated with Óðinn's protection up to this point, has been taken away.

Wagner's ability to change a few words into great dramatic moments is shown in his treatment of Siegfried's awakening of the valkyrie from the Poetic Edda, which shapes *Die Walküre* from this point on as well as the last scene of the third act of *Siegfried*. In the Poetic Edda the valkyrie is known as Sigrdrífa, but the identification with figures of the Nibelung legend goes back to the Middle Ages when *Völsunga saga* calls her simply Brynhildr, when she tells the tale of her disobedience of Óðinn by interfering in a fight between two kings against the god's wishes. She refers to the combatants as Hjálm-Gunnarr and Agnarr. Wagner changes them to Hunding and Siegmund, and, although he has Brünnhilde side with Siegmund, Wotan intervenes and causes the death of his son by shattering his sword. Almost the entire last act of *Die Walküre* is taken up with Wotan's rage and finally his parting from his beloved daughter, a relationship that Wagner invented. He concludes the act by calling on Loge, by now definitely a god of fire, to surround the rock on which Brünnhilde is sleeping. His final words are sung to the Siegfried motif and warn that no one who fears the point of his spear will be able to penetrate the fire.

Siegfried draws heavily on Fouqué's *Sigurd der Schlangentödter*, but it includes several episodes that were either drawn directly from the Icelandic

sources or from summaries in secondary literature, along with a few inventions by the composer. While the opening scene with its shattering of a sword is derived almost entirely from *Völsunga saga* (and Fouqué), the riddle scene with the Wanderer, who is obviously Wotan in a transparent disguise, is derived from similar Old Norse riddle scenes in which the opponent was often a giant. In all of the Norse sources it is Reginn, the smith, who forges the sword from the fragments kept by Sigurðr's mother, Hjördís. In his original version of the Nibelung myth (1848), Wagner had Siegfried forge the sword 'under Mime's direction,' while in the later texts Wagner has Siegfried violating the rules Mime had given him. Both scenes depart from the Norse version in which Reginn forges the sword because Wagner felt that the hero should forge his own weapon.

The scene between Wotan and Alberich is Wagner's invention. Siegfried's fight with the dragon is a relatively straightforward adaptation of the sources. The only significant change is that the smith who has raised him, Mime, is portrayed in the *Ring* as a brother of Alberich, not a brother of the dragon, Fafner. When Siegfried tastes the dragon's blood, he is able to understand the language of the birds, as in all the Norse sources. They instruct him to kill Mime and to seek Brünnhilde asleep on the rock. Both the scene in which he imagines his mother, and the scenes with the Woodbird demonstrate his closeness to Nature by means of motifs built on the same harmonic structure as the music of the Rhine Daughters in *Das Rheingold*.

Siegfried's encounter with the Wanderer (Wotan) is not part of any known myth, but it does fulfill his role as breaker of the power of the gods, when he breaks the spear that had shattered his sword in the previous opera. The awakening of the valkyrie is very much as it is told both in the Poetic Edda and in *Völsunga saga*. The only difference is Brünnhilde's reluctance to give up her virginity (and thus what is left of her divine nature) to Siegfried.

The last drama of the *Ring* is also the earliest. It was conceived in 1848 as a single opera, *Siegfrieds Tod*, and many scenes are used from it without change. It bore this title through the first publication (along with the changes that made it *Götterdämmerung*) to friends in 1853, and it was only renamed in between that time and the publication of the cycle as a public text in 1863. In this text, Wagner combined more thoroughly than elsewhere the German *Nibelungenlied* with the Icelandic texts that provided most of his plot for the *Ring* (Haymes 2009). As a result, the mythic background is more complex than in the other operas. The opening scene with the three Norns is derived from Norse sources (and Jacob Grimm). Wagner simply has three numbered but unnamed Norns although their competencies are still those of the Icelandic trio: Urðr (that which has come about, the past), Verðandi (that which is becoming, the pre-

Figure 4.1.5: The lovers Siegfried and Brünnhilde at the end of *Siegfried*, just before they withdraw to the cave. From Rackham 1979. Reproduced with permission from Dover Publications, New York.

sent) and Skuld (that which is fated to come about, the future) dealing with the rope of fate. Wagner added the telling detail about the rope of fate breaking before the *Ring*'s publication in 1853 in order to strengthen his idea that the power of the gods is coming to an end. At the end of each speech by the Norns there is a tag, very much as in *Völuspá* after each of the visions, as each of the Norns in her turn intones *Weißt du wie das wird* ('Do you know how that will turn out'?). In the scene between Brünnhilde and Siegfried, he gives her the ring and accepts her armour and horse in exchange. Except for the magic potion that causes him to forget Brünnhilde, the main scene of the first act is derived from the *Nibelungenlied* and from dramatic necessity. The scene between Brünnhilde and Waltraute is also Wagner's invention, reflecting the gods awaiting their fate. The final scene of the first act between Brünnhilde and the disguised Siegfried is derived from the Norse version in which Sigurðr exchanges appearances with Gunnarr and fulfills her demand that any man she marries would have to penetrate the fire surrounding her abode. The change in appearances in the Norse versions was a part of the magic Sigurðr and Gunnarr learned from Grimhildr (the mother of Gunnarr), not the power of the Tarnhelm, as it is in the *Ring*. In Gunnarr's shape, Sigurðr takes the ring from her as a token of marriage as Siegfried does in the opera. Like Siegfried, Sigurðr also places the sword between himself and Brynhild as a witness to the non-sexual nature of their encounter.

The nocturnal visit between Hagen and his father Alberich that opens the second act of *Götterdämmerung* is also Wagner's invention. The remainder of the act is largely built from materials invented by the composer. Brünnhilde sees the ring on Siegfried's finger and realizes what a trick has been played on her. The oath scene derives its power from the stories told by Brünnhilde and Siegfried as justifications for their actions. In the vengeance trio, it is Brünnhilde and not Kriemhilt (as in the *Nibelungenlied*) who is drawn into complicity with Siegfried's murder. In the final act of the cycle, there is little left of the Norse mythology from which Wagner had derived much of his drama. The scene with the Rhine Daughters, the murder of Siegfried, the scene with Gutrune alone and the excuses provided by Hagen all derive from the *Nibelungenlied* (Haymes 2009). From the entry of Brünnhilde onwards there is precious little that can be attributed to anything but Wagner's own dramatic sense. Wagner saw the end of the gods' power (*Götterdämmerung*) as the end of the established power structure. The musical composition may have taken Wagner more than twenty years, but he completed the text in 1853, a time when he was in the greatest revolutionary fervour. He made minor changes in the text as he set about composing the music (for the most important of these see Dahlhaus 1971), but he left the basic message of the text as it was in 1853.

His first dramatic thoughts on the subject are contained in the opera *Siegfrieds Tod*, which he never set to music. There, he follows even more closely the model given to him in *Völuspá*, a text which forms a basis for the *Ring* cycle by providing a structure for the gods' misbehaviour. Siegfried's death leads to a restitution of the gods' power, not to its overthrow, as Brünnhilde returns to her valkyrie calling and leads Siegfried to Valhalla, where he will join the other warriors in the final battle against the fire-giants. After the uprising in Dresden failed to set off the revolution Wagner imagined, he had to write a new conclusion, one that foresaw an even more radical elimination of political power. The new conclusion (the one actually used) portrayed the end of the gods, who had been fashioned in the final form of the *Ring* cycle into the nobility and bureaucrats of his day.

The *Ring des Nibelungen* was first performed at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth in 1876.[6] In order to get out from under the heavy debts that were occasioned by that production, Wagner sold the scenery and costumes to Angelo Neumann, who toured throughout Europe with the *Ring* and made the cycle generally known to many Europeans who had been financially or otherwise unable to travel to Bayreuth for the premiere. Although photography was known at the time, there were no photographs taken of the first performances in Bayreuth, and the only images we have are from Neumann's touring company.

Aftermath

Ever since Wagner decided to use Germanic mythology for his cycle, a great deal has been written about his use of myth and his own concept of myth. It should be clear from the synopsis given above that he wrote a whole new story, one based on his own idea of the Nibelung myth but one which was as much guided by the pressures of dramatic necessity and contemporary culture as by the pre-Christian religions of the North. In spite of this, there has been much use of his versions of the Nibelung myth as if it had been 'the real thing' over the decades since its conception.

Between the second act of *Siegfried* and the resumption of work on the *Ring* some twelve years later, Wagner set out to write operas that could be performed more easily than the giant *Ring* cycle. He composed *Tristan und Isolde*

[6] *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* had both been premiered in Munich, in 1869 and 1870 respectively. The composer had presented the still unfinished *Ring* to the king of Bavaria. The first performance of the entire cycle was in 1876 in Bayreuth.

between 1856 and 1859. In 1860 he set out one final time to conquer Paris with a new production of *Tannhäuser*. The negative reaction to this production (for which he wrote additional music) led to a return to Germany. After a period in Vienna, where *Tristan* was abandoned after many rehearsals, Wagner was at the end of his rope and may have considered suicide. He was eventually tracked down in Stuttgart when the young king of Bavaria, Ludwig II, had him brought to Munich and the realization of his dreams. The king paid all his debts and installed him in Munich. In 1865 *Tristan und Isolde* was finally performed there. In 1868 *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* was premiered. Neither of these operas played in the mythical world of the *Ring*. The first two operas of the *Ring* cycle also received their first performances at the court theatre in Munich. Wagner did try to see *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung* through the same lens when he wrote in his *Epilogischer Bericht* to the *Ring*: *Der große Zusammenhang aller ächten Mythen* [...] *hatte mich* [...] *hellsichtig gemacht,* [...] *daß Tristan wie Siegfried das ihm nach dem Urgesetze bestimmte Weib, im Zwange einer Täuschung, welche diese seine That zu einer unfreien macht, für einen Anderen freit, und aus dem hieraus entstehenden Misverhältnisse seinen Untergang findet* ('The great identity of all genuine myths [...] made me particularly sensitive to this: [...] Tristan, like Siegfried, wins the woman destined for him by primeval law, forced by an illusion that makes his action unfree, for another and the disparity arising from this causes his death'; Wagner 1911: VI, 267–68). The final opera, *Parsifal*, used Christian myth much as he had used Norse myth in the *Ring* cycle.

Wagner lived in a period dominated by the 'Young Germany' movement and included his notion of the revolution that would return things to the order that he saw when he looked back to Germanic antiquity. His notion was basically a revolution against the power structures of his day. As such it was a revolution against the status quo fed by the writings of Ludwig Feuerbach and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and by his own vision of the Germanic past. He was a friend of Mikhail Bakunin, who had a far more radical notion of revolution than Wagner, but the composer joyfully joined the uprising in Dresden in May of 1849 and, after a brief stay in Weimar with Liszt, fled to Switzerland with a price on his head. In 1864 his life took on an entirely different direction when he was found and installed as 'court composer' by the impressionable young king of Bavaria, Ludwig II. He gradually moved from being the revolutionary of the early 1850s to a more conciliatory attitude toward the powers that be, particularly when they worked for him. In later years, he played down his role in the uprising of 1849. It was very easy for those who supported him to take his German nationalism, anti-Semitism and his desire for a purified German

soul from a radical leftist agenda to a radical rightist one. This was particularly true after Wagner's death.

Wagner's ideas of Norse myths and Germanic unity were intensified and altered by the members of the Bayreuth circle that took over his heritage after his death in 1883. Cosima Wagner, the composer's widow, was the centre of this circle, and her notions of Wagner's attitudes and thoughts were amplified by such writers as Hans von Wolzogen, Carl Friedrich Glasenapp and particularly Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who eventually (1908) married Wagner's daughter Eva, thus gaining a central position in the Bayreuth circle. Wagner's son Siegfried was probably a reluctant member, being generally apolitical. His attachment to his mother and his eventual marriage to Winifred Williams, however, brought him back into the circle, especially since his wife became and remained a convert to Hitler from the earliest days in 1923 until her death in 1980. She even provided him with the paper on which he wrote *Mein Kampf*. Chamberlain managed to die before the Nazis came to power and thus, without his physical presence in the way, his writings became an important link between the composer's nationalism and anti-Semitism and that of Hitler and his cronies. Siegfried's sons, Wieland and Wolfgang, were good Nazis until after the war when they built up what was called 'New Bayreuth' and presided over the general amnesia that surrounded the composer's anti-Semitism and the collusion of Bayreuth in Hitler's rise to power. There can be little doubt that Bayreuth had a major formative influence on Hitler and that Wagner's concept of pre-Christian 'Germanic' religion played an important role in the formation of the 'mythology' behind Nazi ideology. Because of this ideology, many scholars in Germany have been reluctant to explore both the Icelandic sources and the Germanic past since the fall of the Nazis in 1945. Wagner never identified any of his characters as Jews, although the dwarves of the Nibelung legend, particularly Mime, were often portrayed as such. We have no way of guessing how Wagner would have reacted to the Nazis, since he died six years before Hitler was born. We know that Hitler drew a great deal of inspiration from Wagner (particularly from *Rienzi*, an opera that the composer had disowned), and that Winifred Wagner was an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazi cause during its early years.

Wagner had a very different effect in France than he did in Germany. Even as far back as the disastrous production of *Tannhäuser* at the Paris Opera in 1860 there were French Wagnerians who saw in his works a prophecy of the future. Charles Baudelaire wrote a complimentary review of the production which he sent to the composer. Edouard Dujardin founded the *Revue Wagnerienne*, after the composer's death, which although it was only published for less than three years (1885–88) was tremendously influential. The Symbolists found in

the music of Wagner, which they had generally only heard in bits and pieces, a kindred spirit. A few French Wagnerians went to Bayreuth to hear Wagner's music in its pristine state. Debussy heard *Parsifal* there and was transformed as a composer, although his relationship to Wagner remained problematic.

One of the high points of Wagnerism in England was the publication in 1898 of *The Perfect Wagnerite* by George Bernard Shaw. This book interpreted the *Ring* as an allegory of capitalism from a Fabian socialist perspective. Shaw saw the Nibelungs and the giants as workers, Alberich as a boss, the gods as capitalists and so on. He even interpreted the Tarnhelm as a top hat, something guaranteeing invisibility in higher circles. His interpretation broke down at approximately the point Wagner took a twelve-year break in the composition. He interpreted the last act of *Siegfried* and the whole of *Götterdämmerung* as 'grand opera', no longer worthy of his interpretive skills. These elements were seen as evidence of its composer becoming a tool of the ruling classes, that is, of the nobles and kings of his day. The English critic Ernest Newman became the reigning expert on Wagner. His four-volume life of the composer was published between 1933 and 1946, although he had published books on Wagner as early as 1899.

Wagner's conception of the Germanic past has arguably been far more influential than Snorri's treatment in the *Edda* or Jacob Grimm's scholarly work. Almost nothing that has been written or expressed in an artwork since 1876 having to do with the medieval North has been without a Wagnerian (or anti-Wagnerian) colouring. It would take this chapter much too far afield to examine the influence of Wagner on all of the arts but several works must be mentioned in this connection. The most important of these is Fritz Lang's pair of films *Die Nibelungen* from 1924. The films were individually entitled *Siegfried* and *Kriemhilds Rache* ('Kriemhild's Revenge'). These films were conceived as a sort of anti-Wagnerian work but included a number of elements that derive from Wagner's synthesis of the different Nibelung legends. The parts having to do with Siegfried's youth are particularly dependent on Wagner's treatment. The fact that Siegfried forges his own sword and that his 'teacher' is Mime come straight from Wagner. Much of the first film and virtually all of the second were derived from the *Nibelungenlied* rather than Wagner, but the films would not have been made had it not been for the immense popularity of the *Ring* cycle.

There have been several other films based on the Nibelung legend, although none have garnered the critical acclaim that Lang's version has. Virtually all of them made some use of Wagner. The last of them even used a popular mistranslation of his title in pre-release publicity: *The Ring of the Nibelungs*. There have also been a number of graphic novel versions of the *Ring*, of which the versions

by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane (1997) and Craig Russell (2002) are probably the most recent.

One could also offer assessments of the various stagings of the *Ring*, particularly since World War II, but these only last a few years and then directors move on to something else. The most important productions have been those associated with 'New Bayreuth', particularly those produced by the composer's grandson Wieland Wagner. These moved away from the specifically Germanic in Wagner's original conception to a general idea of the mythical. Some people still have in their minds the image of Hans Hotter as Wotan singing the role in a Greek costume in a 'New Bayreuth' production (after 1951). The centennial *Ring* by Boulez and Chereau in 1976 tried to realize on stage the interpretation of George Bernard Shaw, who saw the events as a representation of Europe in the grip of the industrial revolution. Since then directors have attempted to show what Wagner really meant or they have reacted to such productions with 'traditional' ones such as the Metropolitan Opera production by Otto Schenk and Günter Schneider-Siemsen that was presented for more than twenty years or the Bayreuth production by Peter Hall (1983) that was conceived as a reaction to the Chereau production. The current production at the Metropolitan Opera in New York (since 2011) is built around an enormously expensive machine, but is in reality quite ordinary. The productions seen at Bayreuth and elsewhere in Europe embody what Americans tend to call Eurotrash. Most of these productions are meretricious, but occasionally one manages to really show something new. The production by Harry Kupfer and Hans Schavernoch in the Berlin Staatsoper (seen in 1999 and 2002) (and since sold to the opera in Barcelona, where they were filmed) was such a production. The emphasis was on the 'green' messages of the *Ring* and most of the action took place around limbs of the tree Yggdrasil that had died from the wound given it when Wotan broke off a branch to make his spear. The conclusion was most moving when two children emerged from the crowd watching the conflagration of the Gibichungs' hall and planted a new tree during the final major key orchestral conclusion pointing to a new beginning. In fact though, the fate of the world ash tree Yggdrasil is spoken of by the Norns in just these terms at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*, so this is a motif that was foreseen by Wagner.

Appendix A. Outline of the *Nibelungenlied*

Siegfried (Sîfrit), who is pictured as a perfectly ordinary prince from Xanten, is in a courtly love relationship with Kriemhild, sister of Gunther of Worms. Hagen, Gunther's chief vassal, tells of Siegfried's dragon fighting and his defeat of the brothers Nibelunc and Schilbunc and his winning treasure and lands from them. After seeing Kriemhild for the first time, Siegfried agrees to go on a wooing expedition with Gunther for Brünhild, queen of Iceland. Gunther accepts Siegfried's request to be his vassal. After winning Brünhild with Siegfried's invisible help, Gunther brings her home. Again with Siegfried's invisible help he manages to deflower her. Many years later Kriemhild and Siegfried are brought to Worms, and Kriemhild and Brünhild are involved in a fight which Kriemhild wins by claiming that Siegfried was the first man to take her maidenhead. Gunther manages to restore peace, but Hagen kills Siegfried. Kriemhild wants nothing but revenge for her fallen husband. Hagen steals the treasure Siegfried had amassed and sinks it in the Rhine.

Attila (Etzel), leader of the Huns, woos Kriemhild through Rúedeger (his primary vassal), and the latter gives his promise to Kriemhild that he will avenge any sorrow that befalls her. Hagen opposes the marriage, saying that it will only further the vengeance for her husband Siegfried. Attila invites the brothers-in-law to visit him many years later. Hagen opposes this too but is told that if he is afraid to go he can stay at home. He goes and leads the Burgundians (who are now called Nibelungs) to their doom. Kriemhild tries to get the Huns to attack and finally gets Bloedelîn (Bleda, Attila's brother) to attack the squires, led by Dankwart (Hagen's brother). Bloedelîn is successful but cannot prevent Dankwart from escaping. He appears, bloody, where Attila and his guests are eating. Hagen kills Attila's son Ortliep, throwing his severed head into Kriemhild's lap. Many bloody exchanges follow with Attila seeking to avenge his son. Finally, Dietrich von Bern, who had originally been friendly to the Burgundians, enters the fray against the two remaining warriors, Gunther and Hagen. He delivers them bound to Kriemhild. She demands the treasure from Hagen, who says that he has sworn that he cannot reveal the hiding place while one of the brothers is still alive. She kills Gunther and Hagen says that the hiding place is known only to 'God and me'. He calls her a she-devil and she kills him. She is then killed by Hildebrant (Dietrich's man-at-arms).

Appendix B. Outline of *Siegfrieds Tod*

In *Siegfrieds Tod* the Norn scene fills in the back story of the gods and the Nibelung dwarf Alberich without having the rope of men's destinies break. The farewell scene between Siegfried and Brünnhilde is virtually unchanged from what it was to be in *Götterdämmerung*. The first act is unchanged until it gets to Hagen's watch. This scene was added in February 1849. The final scene was changed completely. The chorus of valkyries reciting what they had observed in the final scene between Brünhilde and Wotan fills in more of the back story: Siegfried appears in Gunther's shape and takes away the ring. In the second act Alberich fills in more of the back story. The main action of the second act, Siegfried's return, Hagen calling out the men, and the oaths are the same as in *Götterdämmerung*, but the conclusion is different. After the vengeance trio, the whole contingent comes back in to celebrate the wedding of Siegfried and Gutrune and Gunther and Brünnhilde. The final act begins with the Rhine Daughters threatening Siegfried with death if he does not give up the ring. He replies that he would give it up for love but not to save his life. He is joined by the other Burgundians including Gunther and Hagen. He sings about his youth, including the fight with Mime. Given an antidote to the potion of forgetfulness by Hagen, he sings about Brünnhilde. Hagen puts a spear into his back and leaves. Siegfried spends his dying breath speaking of Brünnhilde, that she will carry him to Valhalla. There is a brief scene for Gutrune and after Siegfried is brought in she attacks Hagen. Brünnhilde enters and gives absolution to Siegfried. Hagen tries to get the ring, but is drowned by the Rhine Daughters.

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4.2 – Scandinavian Myths in Nineteenth-Century Opera and Choral Music

Barbara Eichner

Whereas classical mythology had been integral to the very genre of opera since its inception in the late sixteenth century — with Jacopo Peri's *Dafne* (1597/98) and *Euridice* (1600) leading the way — Scandinavian myths and deities had to wait for another two centuries. The 'heroic *singspiel*' *Balders Død* by playwright Johannes Ewald and Johann Emil Hartmann, music director at the Danish court from 1768, marks the beginning of a small but intriguing tradition of musical recreations of Scandinavian mythology and poetry that followed in the wake of the Old Norse translations and editions of the eighteenth century.[1] *Balders Død* was first performed to celebrate the birthday of King Christian VII in 1779 and was received enthusiastically by the opera-going public; in 1791 Hartmann's successor Johann Abraham Peter Schulz revised and revived the *singspiel* in an attempt to foster a home-grown tradition of grand opera based on indigenous stories and invoking a 'Nordic' tone (Mulvad 1980).

Thus Scandinavian mythology was from the start linked to the idea of a 'national school' of music that marked a conscious departure from the main-

[1] On Ewald and *Balders Død*, see further Volume 1 of this study, Chapters 5.2 and 6.1.

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stream Italian or French traditions.[2] Such an approach was by no means unique to the Scandinavian countries, where the cultivation of large-scale genres like opera and oratorio was restricted to a handful of urban centres, but was also embraced by many German poets and composers who utilized the Scandinavian heritage for the construction of their own national identity (Eichner 2012: 24–26). British composers similarly vacillated between their — supposedly — Celtic, Saxon and Northern roots to create musical works that appealed to the popular national imagination. For example, in 1889 the Leeds Music Festival featured the premieres of the 'Nordic' cantatas *The Sword of Argantyr* by Frederick Corder and *The Sacrifice of Freia* by William Creser, as well as Charles Villiers Stanford's *The Voyage of Maeldune based on an Ireland-inspired text by Alfred Tennyson*.[3] In other parts of Europe vikings and valkyries had a more obviously exotic appeal and provided a pleasant change from the standard operatic personnel, inviting stage designers to invent picturesque settings of wild Nordic nature. The following chapter will draw on a selection of operas and choral works in order to exemplify the multifaceted approaches to the mythological material. Unfortunately none of these musical compositions is still part of today's living repertoire, and even in their own time many were performed only once or twice and then were quickly relegated to oblivion, which makes them hard to access and evaluate for their musical and poetic merits.

There are two additional complications: some of the most popular compositions of the nineteenth century are not directly based on Old Norse texts, whether in the original Norse or in translation. Composers rather rode on the wave of success of popular adaptations, which in their own right shaped nineteenth-century perceptions of the Scandinavian gods and heroes. For example, Edward Elgar scored an early success with the cantata *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* (1896), an adaptation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poetic version of *Heimskringla*, transmitted to an English-speaking readership through the translation by Samuel Laing (Wawn 2000: 111–15). Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, in turn, was inspired by a musical phenomenon, as 'The Saga of King Olaf' is narrated by a travelling Norwegian violinist, easily identified as the famous Ole Bull (Bergsagel 2014: 76–77). Any allusion to Nordic deities or mythology is therefore at least at one remove. Likewise Max Bruch's cantata *Scenen aus der Frithjof-Sage* op. 23, which enjoyed continuing popularity from its first performance in 1864 well into the twentieth century, is based on

[2] For a recent survey of the development in Denmark, see Schwab (2017).

[3] *Leeds Festival Chorus* <http://www.leedsfestivalchorus.co.uk/history/1890s.html> [accessed 7 February 2014].

a rather eclectic selection from Esaias Tegnér's widely read and translated epic poem *Frithiofs saga*, rather than on a Nordic source directly.[4] The six movements focus on the feelings of the protagonists Frithjof and Ingeborg (sung by the standard combination of baritone and soprano soloist respectively), the courage and bravery of the vikings in the outer, choral movements, and the conflagration of Baldur's temple as the central scene.[5] Many musicians and music-lovers of the nineteenth century would thus have derived their notions of pagan religion from Tegnér's romanticized take on viking life and mores, transformed skilfully by Bruch into spine-chilling chants, as the priests praise the blood-red midnight sun, accompanied by low brass and eerily rising high strings.

The second major obstacle to evaluating this heterogeneous repertoire is the fact that it has been overshadowed by Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* since the 1870s. Scholarly as well as popular discussions are slanted towards comparisons with his music dramas, in many cases focusing solely on the question of whether or not the other, implicitly 'minor', composer was influenced by Wagner's tetralogy. Admittedly towards the end of the century an increasing number of composers selected mythological material in allegiance to the Bayreuth master and his aesthetic principles, to the extent that the critic Arthur Seidl (1892: 13) warned the acolytes of a 'Wagner school' of music drama: *Götter und Helden thun's noch nicht; im Gegenteil, sie thun's um so weniger, als die Dichter es meist an der psychologischen Vertiefung wie an einer strafferen Dramatik dabei fehlen lassen* ('Gods and heroes are by no means sufficient; on the contrary they are all the less sufficient as the poets usually lack psychological depth and a stringent dramaturgy.') Outside the circle of self-conscious Wagnerians, however, Wagner's influence can rarely be demonstrated unequivocally or is of little relevance to the genesis (if not to the reception) of the musical work in question.

The grand opéra *Sigurd* by the French composer Ernest Reyer provides a case in point. It was first performed at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels on 7 January 1884, that is, when Wagner's *Ring* was already widely known. The conception of the work, however, dates back to the mid-1860s when Reyer and his team of librettists, Camille du Locle and Alfred Blau, might have known the general gist of Wagner's project but hardly its unperformed (and partially unwritten) music. Whereas the text of *Götterdämmerung* is mainly indebted to

[4] For the reception of Tegnér's epic poem in Germany, see Freyberger (2011).

[5] Throughout the chapter, the spelling of proper names follows the individual usage of the librettists or composers, hence 'Frithjof' rather than 'Frithiof', or 'Baldur' rather than 'Baldr'.

Figure 4.2.1: *Sigurd*, by Ernest Reyer: 'Soixante-treize planches de costumes par Charles Blanchini', Bibliothèque musée de l'Opéra (D216–39 (32.35). Vue 50/89, no. 35 'Norne'. Reproduced with permission from the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Völsunga saga, du Locle and Blau freely mix elements from the Norse sources and the *Nibelungenlied*, while adapting them to the specific requirements of French operatic taste.[6] For example, the second and third acts feature extended ballet sequences, the latter a more conventional celebration of the double wedding of Gunther and Brunehild, and Sigurd and Hilda respectively. The second-act ballet, in contrast, is a more fantastic invocation of the obstacles Sigurd has to face when liberating Brunehild from her enchanted sleep: the three Norns wash a shroud intended for the hero; valkyries, goblins, water-sprites and elves try to wrest Odin's magic horn from him, and after Brunehild's awakening the Norns, transformed into magic swans, draw Brunehild and Sigurd towards the Rhine in a crystal barge. Such scenes satisfied the audience's appetite for picturesque and exotic locations, while Reyer opted for a musical idiom that is consciously different from that of the preceding and concluding acts, prominently featuring the harp (since the Ossianic fashion a musical marker of all things Nordic) and archaizing chants of the priests of Odin (Jahrmärker 1994: 234–35).

The musical language, with its symmetric choral tableaux, frequent musical repetitions and reminiscence motifs, is not indebted to Wagner to any meaningful extent, but the affinity of the plot lines made comparisons inevitable. The critic of the partisan *Revue wagnérienne*, for example, dismissed *Sigurd* as a 'trivial piece' and admitted: 'I know that these comparisons [with Wagner] are annoying, but does the libretto used by M. Reyer not invite them?'[7] Sections of the text indeed invite comparison, though du Locle and Blau usually steered clear of a 'Nordic' idiom and stuck to conventional end-rhyming verses. In the scene when Brunehild awakens from her enchanted sleep, however, they could not resist modelling her opening words on the eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál*, which they would have known about from the extensive preface of Émile de Laveleye's French translation of the *Nibelungenlied*, whose edition of *La saga des Nibelungen dans les Eddas* (1866) offers the heroic poems (Huebner 1999: 178–79). The similarities with the equivalent scene in Wagner's *Siegfried* are striking, but there is no reason to assume that the French artists could not have realized the poetic appeal of the eddic poem without Wagner's assistance. In fact, Brunehild's final lines, invoking the assistance of the gods, are closer to the Nordic source than Brünnhilde's welcome to her predestined saviour Siegfried.

As Reyer and his librettists were aware of the inevitable comparisons with Wagner's *Ring*, it is possible that the elimination of much mythological mate-

[6] For a comparison, see Huebner (1999: 179).

[7] Quoted in Huebner (1999: 184).

***Sigrdrífumál* sts 3–4**	**Brünnhilde (Wagner, *Siegfried*)**
3. Heill dagr, heilir dags synir, heil nótt oc nipt! óreiðom augom lítið ocr þinig, oc gefit sitiondom sigr!	Heil dir, Sonne! Heil dir, Licht! Heil dir, leuchtender Tag! Lang war mein Schlaf; ich bin erwacht. Wer ist der Held, der mich erweckt? [...]
4. Heilir æsir, heilar ásynior, heil siá in fiolnýta fold! mál oc manvit gefit ocr mærom tveim oc læcnishendr, meðan lifom!	Heil euch, Götter! Heil dir, Welt! Heil dir, prangende Erde! Zu End' ist nun mein Schlaf; erwacht, seh' ich: Siegfried ist es, der mich erweckt!

Table 4.2.1: Comparison of the awakening of the valkyrie

rial between the project stage in the 1860s and the completion of the opera is a conscious attempt to avoid criticism as mere Wagner epigones. The first scenario by Michel Carré contained a prologue where Brunehild is put to sleep by Odin, which was deleted before the composition started, along with 'references to Fafnir, the sword, the treasure, and Sigurd's invulnerability' (Huebner 1999: 180–81). Similarly the finale first culminated in Sigurd and Brunehild's elevation to Valhalla, complete with banquet of the gods, whereas the printed libretto features a vision of Attila brooding over the dead bodies of Burgundian warriors (du Locle and Blau 1884: 60). History, as transmitted by the *Nibelungenlied*, is thus reinstated at the expense of eddic mythology, in accordance with the aesthetic precepts of French grand opéra which avoided the supernatural in favour of logically constructed plots on historical subjects (Huebner 1999: 181). Despite these modifications, not everybody was happy with the use of Scandinavian — or 'Teutonic' — sources in the first place; the strongly classicist tradition of French drama and opera revolted against the Nordic invasion. The critic Henry Fouquier, for example, complained that 'this mythology, which has neither the depth nor the elegance of Hellenism, leaves us [the French], one must admit, completely cold', and his colleague Jacques Hermann speculated that *Sigurd* would long have been performed in Paris if the opera had been called *Achille* or *Hercule*.[8] Thus while the similarities of Reyer's opera to Wagner appear striking to the modern observer, they are not

[8] *Le XIXe siècle*, 15 June 1885, and *Le Pays*, 16 June 1885, quoted in Huebner (1999:183, 184).

Brunehild (Reyer, *Sigurd*)

Salut! Splendeur du jour! Salut! astre au front pur,
Qui des rayons d'or sèmes l'immense azur!
Dieux! abaissez sur nous des regards favorables,
Aux douleurs des humains montrez-vous secourables!

Salut, terre! Salut! nourrice au sein fécond,
Qui fais croître pour nous l'épi du froment blond!
Dieux! que votre bonté nous donne en sa largesse:
La force, la raison, le savoir, la sagesse!

necessarily crucial when considering the various ways in which mythological subjects were adapted to the nineteenth-century stage.

With these reservations in mind, the following pages will present a number of musical works that are more or less closely based on the Scandinavian mythological tradition. As the examples span a century and straddle a wide range of musical styles and genres, no attempt will be made to construct a unified repertoire of 'Nordic' compositions based on national traditions or stylistic criteria. In addition the discussion will be centred on mythological stories in the more closely defined sense, whose supernatural or heroic attributes resonated with nineteenth-century audiences and artists: gods, valkyries and the skalds who sang their praises.

Gods

Of all the mythological stories related in the Poetic Edda and the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, only the death of Baldr appears to have inspired a considerable number of composers. (A notable exception, Peter Cornelius's operatic fragment *Gunlöd*, elaborates on the creation of the mead of poetry and will therefore be discussed in the section on skalds.) Possibly the scarcity of love stories made the Scandinavian tradition less attractive for the stage than its classical counterparts (there is hardly a plot to Freyr's wooing of Gerd), while the more burlesque stories, such as Skaði choosing Njörðr for her husband because she mistakes his beautiful feet for Baldr's, would have sat uneasily with the high-minded and passionate tone of nineteenth-century opera. The Baldr narrative offered at least the grand panorama of the rise and fall of the gods, though for the stage a dose of conventional romantic interest was injected all the same. Consequently the opera *Der Fremdling* (1899) by the famous Wagner tenor Heinrich Vogl invents a love-triangle involving Baldur, the human woman Nanna, and her suitor King Hâko that has no base in the Norse tradition and only scant foundation in Saxo Grammaticus. The libretto by the jurist and poet Felix Dahn elaborates a poem of his own

invention, in which Baldur in disguise wins and tests the love of a human maiden.[9]

Cyrill Kistler's music drama *Baldurs Tod* ('Baldr's Death', 1891, first performed 1905) likewise unfolds the story of Baldur's betrayal and death against the backdrop of his love for the human girl Nana [!], who is rejected by his parents Odin and Frigga and only reunited with Baldur on the funeral pyre. In this respect the finale is reminiscent of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, but the last scene takes a curious twist: while Odin ponders the Norns' prophecy that the Æsir have to 'make way for a higher, a purer one' (*Einem Höheren machen* [*wir*], *einem Reineren Raum*!, Kistler 1906: 177), the stage is transformed, to the strains of the Protestant hymn *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*, into a Romanesque church with a statue of Jesus Christ, his hand raised in benediction. The 'twilight of the gods' is thus superseded by the rise of Christianity, but a Christianity rooted in Northern mythology rather than biblical Judaism, which can be interpreted as an early example of the artistic assimilation of *völkisch* ideas.[10] Elsewhere Kistler's librettist, the physician Carl Edgar Freiherr von Sohlern, modelled two key scenes directly on eddic poetry. At the beginning of Act 1, Odin meets the 'Wala' in her cave and questions her about the rings strewn on the benches, the killer and avenger of Baldur and the woman who refuses to shed tears over his death. The dialogue, set in Wagnerian-style recitative underscored with leitmotifs, closely follows the poem *Baldrs draumar*, with the difference that the 'Wala' only responds to Odin's first question but then keeps silent until she recognizes Odin in the guise of 'Wegwalt'. As she disappears she admonishes Odin — a twist invented by the librettist — to bless the plants, which the god does in an arioso set-piece that was published independently of the opera and was moderately successful in its own right. The agency of protecting Baldur is thus transferred from his mother Frigga to 'All Father' Odin, possibly because the goddess is portrayed in a negative light as a nagging wife and jealous mother, resembling Wagner's Fricka from act two of *Die Walküre*, despite Kistler's protestations (1892: 53–56) that his deities were entirely different from and superior to Wagner's Nibelungs.

Even more striking is the almost literal use of the eddic poem *Lokasenna* in the second act, in the crystal palace of the sea-god 'Oegir'. After a celebratory chorus, which frames a short, sombre monologue of Odin, Loki appears, kills Oegir's guardsman 'Zünder' (a very literal translation of the Old Norse 'Eldir')

[9] For a discussion of Dahn's libretto and its sources, see Eichner (2011: 315–22).

[10] For a full discussion of Kistler's world-view and his rejection of Wagner's *Ring*, see Eichner (2012: 146–61).

and then launches into a string of invectives. The exchange of insults, including some phrases translated almost verbatim, follows exactly the sequence of stanzas in the Norse original (though nineteenth-century squeamishness skips the 'perversions' of Odin and Loki) until stanza 28, when Loki boasts that he is responsible for Baldur's failure to return home. While in the eddic poem this is an allusion to Loki's role in Baldr's death, in the music drama he reveals that Baldur loves a human woman and therefore spurns divine company. Gods and goddesses vent their anger in an upset chorus, and Loki disappears when the thunder-god Donar enters.[11] Odin launches once more into a pensive monologue as the gods entreat him to save them from peril. At the very end of the act the three Norns appear and foretell the end of the gods. Even for a nineteenth-century music drama, this act is remarkably thin in terms of plot development. Its main purpose — apart from showcasing the mythological learning of librettist and composer — seems to be to characterize Loki as the 'the god of evil', as he is identified in the vocal score. However, this is already accomplished more convincingly in the first act when Loki insinuates himself into Höder's trust and kindles the blind god's jealousy of his more glamorous brother, a quite convincing transfer of *fin-de-siècle* psychology into myth. In several of Kistler's many self-published articles which he launched to defend his music drama, he invokes the authority of the Edda and of 'Sämund' to stave off criticism.[12] While he does not reveal which edition or translation he (or his librettist) used, Kistler (1892: 55) proudly displays his learning by referring to the theories of Sophus Bugge as well as popular contemporary editions, such as Wilhelm Wägner's *Nordisch-germanische Götter und Helden* (1882), aimed at young readers, or ideologically warped treatises like Ernst Krause's *Tuisko-Land der arischen Stämme und Götter Urheimat: Erläuterungen zum Sagenschatze der Veden, Edda, Ilias und Odyssee* (1891). His concern for mythological and philological authority makes Kistler's opera unique amongst the group of late Romantic music dramas, which in some way or other were inspired by Wagner's turn towards mythology on the one hand, and the patriotic craze for everything 'Nordic' — and by extension 'German(ic)' — on the other.

Surprising as the appearance of a statue of Christ may appear, Kistler's opera was by no means the only musical work with a Christian denouement. In the

[11] While von Sohlern and Kistler usually favour Norse names, here they seem to follow Wagner's usage (Donner) by calling the thunder god Donar rather than Thor.

[12] For example, in the extensive response 'Ein offenes Wort an Herrn Moriz Wirth', in *Tagesfragen* 8, no. 6 (July 1891), 84.

nineteenth century Baldr was commonly considered the god of light who dies through the forces of darkness in order to return in triumph. The preface to the vocal score of Charles Harford Lloyd's short choral piece *The Song of Balder* (1885), for example, informs the reader: 'Balder, the God of Light, Peace, and Day, was slain by Höder, the blind old God of Darkness and Night. But from the sleep of death he woke again, and came to gladden the world with his presence.' Such an interpretation made it nearly irresistible to equate Balder with Christ and to filter the Scandinavian myth through nineteenth-century religious attitudes. The preface continues:

> Balder is the son of the All-Father; and Balder's life is encompassed by the powers of Darkness. But [...] Balder will return. [...] Sorrow for his departure becomes faith in his return. It is the faith which beautifies, invigorates, and informs all the nobler actions of man, the faith that looks to the regeneration of the world, and rests upon a new order of things.

Odin's attribute as 'All Father' — according to *Snorra Edda*, he is just the father of all the gods — strengthens a Christian reading of the myth and appears in other musical genres as well. The text of the cantata *Helgoland* by August Silberstein, set to music by Anton Bruckner in 1893, switches from the appellation *Allvater* to the German-Austrian *Herrgott* when the pagan inhabitants of the island pray for deliverance from a Roman invasion. From there it was only a small step to the finale of the 'lyric drama' *Baldur* (1893) by the English composer Howard Orsmond Anderton which features — like Kistler's opera — a vision of Christ, but takes the identification much further since his Baldur knows that he has to die for the sins of the world.[13]

The Christian subtext is even more pronounced in the oratorio *Der Tod Balders* (1886) by the Hamburg music director Otto Beständig. Although it ends with the death of the god, the final chorus, which is allotted to the humans, triumphantly praises the return of the light at the behest of the omnipotent creator.[14] Here the tradition of the oratorio, which was rooted in early modern forms of musical devotion and traditionally presented biblical stories, is likely to have triggered the Christian twist to the pagan myth. As such pieces had to end on a happy or at least morally sustaining note, the mythological model was sometimes changed to a considerable extent. The very title of Alexander Campbell Mackenzie's cantata *The Sun-God's Return* (1910), based on a text

[13] The music was perhaps never completed and is lost today.

[14] For a discussion of this oratorio and its context, see Heidrich (2001).

by Joseph Bennett, indicates that Baldur returns in splendour from Hel, as all creatures had wept over his death. Whether the cantata *Baldurs Drøm* op. 117 (1856–57) by the Danish composer Niels W. Gade would have featured a similarly uplifting ending is hard to tell, as only the first section of the three-part work on a text by Adolph Hertz — who later translated Wagner's operas into Danish — was completed. Gade's cantata employs, like Beständig's oratorio, the traditional forces of soloists, chorus and orchestra and takes almost an hour in performance. That the European choral movements, ever keen on novel pieces for their festivals and competitions, relished Scandinavian mythology also in small-scale works is evidenced not only by Lloyd's *The Song of Balder* mentioned above but also by the choral piece *Nanna's Klage* op. 59 (1887) by the German composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg. The text by Wilhelm Jordan from his collection *Die Nibelunge* [!] uniquely chooses the female perspective and gives voice to Nanna's anguish after the death of her beloved. As an individual albeit rather sentimental take on Nordic mythology, this text was quite successful and was turned into a solo *lied* with piano accompaniment by several other composers.

However, the majority of choral songs invoking Nordic gods eschew the sentimental in favour of the martial. In many nations, but especially in Germany, choral singing was considered an effective tool in the construction of a national identity and the celebration of a national community. Male choirs especially, which had sprung up across the German countries in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, imagined themselves as singing warriors with 'lyre and sword' (Klenke 1998). Songs on patriotic or bellicose texts formed a considerable portion of the repertoire, and of those many invited the modern singers to cast themselves in the roles of Germanic or viking warriors. The militant tones got more strident as the century progressed due to the influence of military values and modes of behaviour which pervaded all strata of society after the birth of the German Empire out of the unification wars. Emperor Wilhelm II himself contributed to the repertoire *Sang an Aegir* (1894), arranged by Albert Becker, the music director of Berlin cathedral, for a variety of musical ensembles.[15] The text is voiced by a group of warriors aboard a dragon ship who implore the Nordic sea god to protect them in storm and battle. The choice of this rather obscure god, who features mainly as the host in *Lokasenna* and as Bragi's sounding board in *Skáldskaparmál*, should be understood in the context of Germany's naval policy, a core initiative of Wilhelm II's claim to world dom-

[15] For a discussion of the musical features of the song, see Heesch (2009a).

ination. The Emperor was a frequent visitor to Norway and a great supporter of everything Nordic, as evidenced not just by the building of stave churches in Germany and a Frithjof monument in Norway but also by the song collections *Nordlandslieder* (1889–93) and *Skaldengesänge* (1885–96) by his friend and favourite Philipp zu Eulenburg.

The imperial tribute to a minor god is outnumbered by the countless choruses that invoke Odin or Wotan as god of battle and war. In their historicist disguise as Teutonic or viking warriors, the singers were able to voice belligerent sentiments that might otherwise have sat uneasily with contemporary Christian ethics. Again poets and composers reacted to the current political climate. The *Hymne an Odin* op. 5, no. 1 (1847) by the Bavarian composer Konrad Max Kunz opens with the line *Odin, du Schlachtengott, dich flehen wir an!* ('Odin, God of battle, we pray to thee!') and ends with a vow to destroy the enemies entirely. The text by Johann Michael Söltl does not name the enemies, but the piece was written in 1847 for a singing festival in Regensburg when the escalating conflict with Denmark over the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein riveted Germans from all directions of the compass (Klenke 1999: 79). The Bavarian composer might also have felt a special affinity to Valhalla thanks to the recent inauguration of the neoclassical temple 'Walhalla' above the Danube near Regensburg (see further on this building and its programme of decoration Volume I of this study, Chapter 6.2.4). The second half of the nineteenth century saw an increasing number of choruses invoking Odin, not least thanks to the efforts of the indefatigable Felix Dahn, who wrote several poems that allude to Nordic or Nordic-Germanic mythology. Amongst others he contributed *Thors Hammerwurf*, which claims the globe for the German(ic) race as far as Thor's hammer flies, and *Siegesgesang der Deutschen nach der Hermannsschlacht*, which celebrates a Germanic victory over the Romans in AD 9 with an invocation of Wodan, Thor and the valkyries: in its setting by Franz Abt (op. 267, 1864), it enjoyed considerable success at singing festivals. The idea of a hereafter populated by fallen heroes, who spend their time on manly pursuits like fighting and drinking, was apparently irresistible to nineteenth-century patriots.

Valkyries

Valhalla as the heaven of heroes was made even more irresistible through the presence of the valkyries, the — in the words of Jenny Jochens (2004: 732) — 'special Nordic contribution to the gallery of female portraits within world literature'. Whether or not warrior maidens had ever existed in reality or were fictional projections, they offered nineteenth-century artists an exciting alter-

native to traditional feminine gender stereotypes and standard romantic situations. Valkyries and their heroes came into their own as operas increasingly embraced the tragic ending of the protagonists in a death-and-transfiguration finale. The most famous instance is of course Brünnhilde's immolation at the end of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. In fact, the earliest version of the finale has Siegfried and his valkyrie-bride ascend to Valhalla, and only in the later versions their shared death also brought about the end of the gods (Dahlhaus 1971). Such a *Liebestod* did not even require the grand backdrop of the operatic stage but could also occur in solo song: Felix Draeseke's song *Helge's Treue* op. 1 (1859) based on a poem by Moritz von Strachwitz has the eponymous hero reject the joys of Valhalla (including the ministrations of a valkyrie) because he cannot forget his dead lover Sigrun, a human warrior maiden who shared his death and burial mound but was not allowed to enter the realm of the gods. Draeseke's mentor Franz Liszt adapted the solo song in 1860 for recitation and piano and dedicated it to the actor Bogumil Dawison. In contrast Felix Weingartner's *Lied der Walküre* op. 36, no. 4 (1904) on yet another text by Felix Dahn takes the female perspective, as the valkyrie recounts how she shielded her hero, supported him in his final victory and now accompanies him to Valhalla. The orchestral song is lushly scored for the late Romantic orchestra: harp arpeggios and tremolando string glorify the hero's death, and the final word *Walhall* is supported with suitably heroic fanfares from the woodwind and brass sections.

Not unlike their medieval predecessors, nineteenth-century artists did not strictly distinguish supernatural and human shield maidens. Scandinavian mythology kindled a general interest in female warriors which, at least on the operatic stage, included human women as well, as the characters of Brunhild in Heinrich Dorn's *Die Nibelungen* (1854) and the eponymous heroine of Draeseke's opera *Herrat* (1879, first performed 1892) attest, who both fight with and for the men they love (Eichner 2009). The Swedish opera *Tirfing* (1897–98) by Anna Boberg (libretto) and Wilhelm Stenhammar (music), adapted from the Old Icelandic *Hervarar saga*, took the idea of the bellicose woman one step further and presented a heroine who, disguised as the hero Hervardur, claims the magic sword Tirfing and finally dies through its fire. As Florian Heesch (2009b) has demonstrated convincingly, the operatic version places the heroine at the centre of the family saga and turns a medieval dynastic expedient — a woman has to disguise herself as a man because she is the only survivor of her family — into a complicated discourse on *fin-de-siècle* gender roles and their transgression. Although no valkyrie proper makes an appearance, references to Scandinavian mythology assist in establishing an appropri-

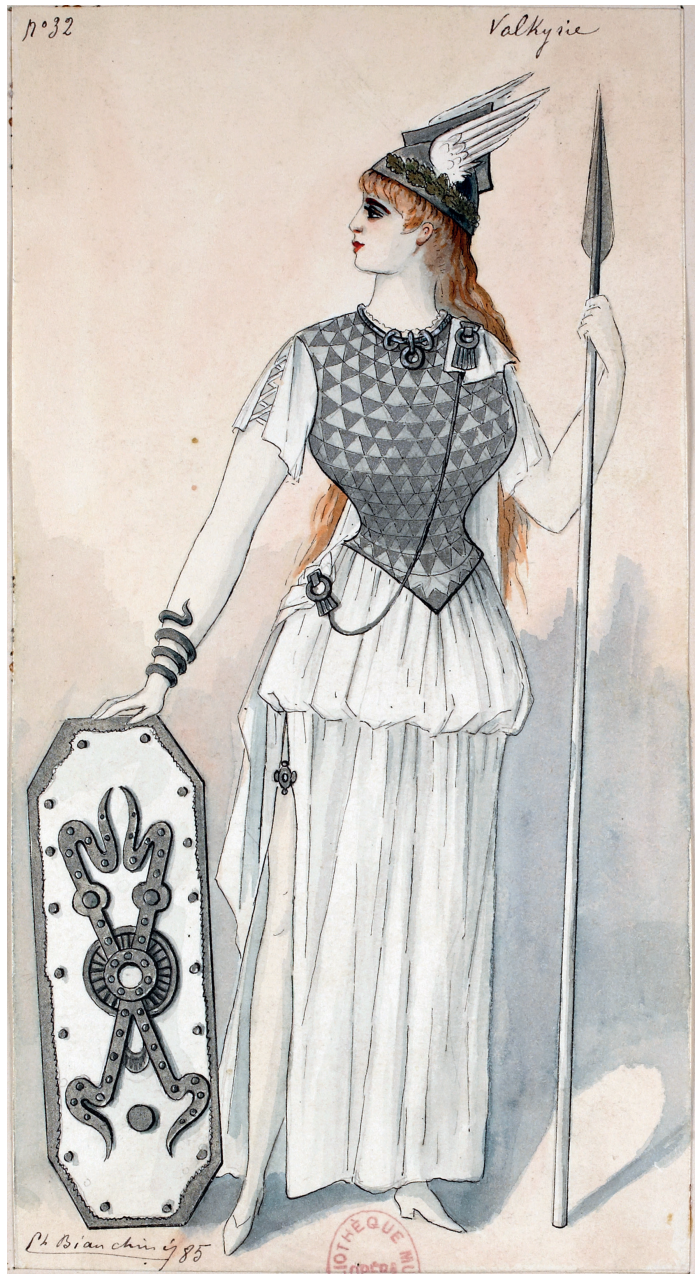

Figure 4.2.2: *Sigurd*, by Ernest Reyer: 'Soixante-treize planches de costumes par Charles Blanchini', Bibliothèque musée de l'Opéra D216–39 (32.35). Vue 46/89, no. 32 'Valkyrie'. Reproduced with permission from the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

ate 'Nordic' local colour. In Reyer's opera *Sigurd* the ballets of the second act, with their Norns, valkyries and other supernatural beings, serve exactly the same purpose.

Valkyries and other women from Nordic mythology came into their own in the romantic ballet, which foregrounded groups of magic female dancers, though usually sylphs or other ethereal beings rather than female warriors (Jowitt 1998). *Valkyrien* ('The Valkyrie' 1861) by the Danish dancer and choreographer Auguste Bournonville and the musician Johan Peter Emilius Hartmann (the grandson of the composer of *Balders Død*) was the first Danish court ballet based on the Scandinavian tradition, combining the story of Helgi from Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* with the valkyrie Sváva from the eddic poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* (Grage 2011: 297). Not unlike Reyer, Hartmann tries to capture the fierceness and vigour of the dancing valkyries through quick tempi, wide melodic leaps and the use of percussion instruments with brass; the symmetrical phrases of the dances, however, are not any different from conventional ballets on non-mythological topics. Combat dances of valkyries and warriors for the entertainment of Odin provided an exciting visual alternative to the gentler fairies and nymphs who usually populated the ballet stage. Costuming them appropriately was, however, a conundrum for nineteenth-century taste and even more difficult than for operatic heroines. While the dancing valkyries carried shields, spears, and winged helmets and their tops vaguely suggested iron-mail shirts, their legs were hidden — or revealed — by the long, white skirts customary in mid-nineteenth- century ballet (Grage 2011: 302).

If Bournonville and Hartmann chose the valkyrie's story because their Copenhagen audiences would be broadly familiar with Nordic mythology and take pride in their national heritage, the Italian choreographer Pasquale Borri and the composer Antonio Baur relied for their 'ballo fantastico' *La dea del Valhalla* (1867) on the exotic appeal of Valhalla/Glasheim as the abode of the gods, the court of the Nordic king Herrard and the underworld 'Hecla' ruled by Loki. Each location is characterized by typical dance ensembles: Glasheim by 'le Valkirie e Divinità del Walhalla'; the human sphere by courtly ladies and gentlemen, hunters and foresters; and 'Hecla' by fire spirits and warriors. Although the short preface exhorts the spectator to abandon the fantastic Orient and embrace the gods and heroes of Scandinavia instead, the plot is entirely spurious: Odin sends his messenger, the goddess Freya, to investigate the activities of the fire god Loki, but soon she loses her magic veil and thus her supernatural powers. Pursued by Loki and his sidekick Tyr, she falls in love with the human prince Ragnar and is finally rescued by him; the final scene in Valhalla celebrates the love and constancy of the couple. Despite the convoluted plot the

ballet was a great success: first staged in Florence in 1867, it was repeated in Naples in the following year and ran for twenty-one performances in Turin and sixty-four at La Scala in Milan during the carnival season of 1870/71.[16] Both the staging and the enthusiastic reception of this curious piece deserve greater scrutiny.

However, as stated above, many stage works of the second half of the nineteenth century ended with the death of the protagonists or even a total cataclysm, and valkyries were a tried and tested means of adding a transcendent dimension to an operatic finale, even if the plot so far had been devoid of gods or other supernatural beings. Most operas written towards the end of the century betray Wagner's influence in their bid for transcendence. The French composer Emanuel Chabrier moved in the circle of Parisian Wagner-enthusiasts, mainly writers and painters, and decided to become a professional musician after experiencing a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Munich in 1880: 'His spontaneous sobbing upon hearing the initial cello A became generally recognized as a *locus classicus* of *fin-de-siècle* infatuation with Wagner.'[17] By that time he had already embarked on his first serious opera *Gwendoline* (completed in 1885, first performed in Brussels in 1886) on a text by the ardent Wagnerian Catulle Mendès, which presents the love story of Harald and Gwendoline against the backdrop of the Danish invasion of a pastoral England populated by peace-loving Saxons. The two protagonists fall in love as Gwendoline prevents Harald from killing her father Armel; Harald is struck by her beauty and gentleness and confesses that she resembles the valkyrie whom he espied when he was wounded in battle. Interestingly Gwendoline rejects the belligerent attributes of the shield-maiden as unseemly for a young girl and proceeds to domesticate the wild invader Harald (Huebner 1999: 273, 276). At the end, however, when he has been wounded in an ambush organized by her father, and she has stabbed herself with his dagger, they share a vision of Valhalla and implore the gods (Chabrier 1886: 295–302): *Odin! Accueille nous, l'heure est venue / De prendre vers le beau Walhalla notre essor! Sur un fier cheval blanc je serai dans la nue / La Walkyrie au casque d'or!* ('Odin! Welcome us, the time has come to take our flight towards beautiful Valhalla! I will be in the high clouds on a proud white horse, the valkyrie in the golden helmet!'). As the Danish

[16] 'Baur Antonio, compositore', in Gaspare Nello Vetro, *Dizionario della musica e dei musicisti dei territori del Ducato di Parma e Piacenza* <http://biblioteche2.comune.parma.it/dm/209.htm> [accessed 28 February 2014].

[17] Huebner, 'Chabrier, Emmanuel'.

Table 4.2.2: Ingeborg von Bronsart, *Hiarne*, final scene

Wir schweben, Walküren Vom Sternenzelt, Zu Walhalla zu führen Hiarne, den Held. Und die er verloren Und die er beweint Ward von Odin erkoren, Ihm ewig vereint.	We float, Valkyries, from the starred heaven, to lead to Valhalla the hero Hiarne. The one he lost, the one he weeps for was chosen by Odin, eternally united with him.
Hilda (schwebt als Walküre langsam hernieder und Chor der Walküren)	*Hilda (slowly descends as a Valkyrie, and chorus of the Valkyries)*
Die Lieb' überwindet Des Lebens Noth Und ihr Aug' erblindet, Selbst nicht im Tod.	Love surmounts the plight of life, and love's eye does not go blind even in death.

ships burn in the background, illuminating the scene with a fiery red light, the chorus comments: *Le palais du Dieu magnanime / S'ouvre devant le pas du couple glorieux; / Ils prennent place enfin dans la salle sublime / A la table auguste des dieux!* ('The palace of the magnanimous God opens at the passage of the glorious couple; they finally take their places in the sublime hall at the majestic table of the gods!'). Contrary to the Scandinavian tradition, which did not admit human women to Valhalla, Gwendoline enters the banqueting hall of the gods with Harald — or at least envisions doing so, as the stage directions do not indicate an actual apotheosis. This may be another instance of the French reluctance to give too much space on stage to the supernatural.

In contrast to Gwendoline, the heroine of Ingeborg von Bronsart's opera *Hiarne* (1891) is transformed into a proper valkyrie to escort her husband Hiarne to Valhalla. Bronsart's opera — one of the very few nineteenth-century stage works written by a woman — is based on a libretto by her husband Hans Bronsart von Schellendorf and Friedrich Bodenstedt, possibly inspired by Felix Draeseke's first opera *Sigurd* and planned as early as the late 1850s, though the text was not finished until 1876 and composition dragged on until 1888 (Boyd 2002: 105–10). The story is loosely based on an episode from the sixth book of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*: after the death of the Danish king Frotho, Hiarne becomes his successor through a singing contest for the most inspired threnody. He also wins the heart and hand of Hilda, daughter of the Swedish king Erik, but he is killed by the rightful but cruel claimant to the throne, Frotho's son Friedleu. Friedleu, in turn, is killed by the god Thor, whose temple he defiled earlier in the opera — possibly yet another echo of the temple scene of Tegnér's

or Bruch's *Frithiof/Frithjof*. In their final fight Hiarne is mortally wounded; at this point, according to the stage directions of the printed libretto (von Bronsart 1890: 48): *Der Hintergrund erhellt sich allmählich und füllt sich mit dichten Wolken. In der Höhe erblickt man die* [!] *Walhalla mit dem Regenbogen, auf welchem die Götter Hiarne entgegen kommen* ('The background lights up gradually and fills with dense clouds. In the heights Valhalla with the rainbow becomes visible, from which the gods advance towards Hiarne'). The valkyries descend and sing a short chorus, which eschews Old Norse (or Wagnerian) *stabreim* in favour of conventional rhymes (see Table 4.2.2).

These sentiments are actually reminiscent of Goethe's pantheism in *Faust II*, where a redeemed Gretchen and a host of spirits lead Faust heavenwards, rather than of the Scandinavian pantheon, but it gave an opportunity for a 'truly splendid staging' at the first performance at the Berlin Court Theatre in 1891, where the opera was enthusiastically received (Simon 1891: 87). Thus it could be argued that valkyries had become an ornament of the *fin-de-siècle* stage, glorifying the death and transfiguration of almost any vaguely Nordic hero or heroine.

Skalds

The main attraction of the Hiarne plot was not, however, the love story grafted onto Saxo's brief narrative, but the figure of the heroic singer-poet who wins a kingdom through his art. While the story from the *Gesta Danorum* emphasizes a commoner's unfitness to rule, for the creative imagination of the nineteenth century it symbolized the power of song and the fate of the artist in an adverse society. Singers had, of course, long been a staple of operatic plots, as they gave the opportunity for diegetic songs, that is, songs that are part of the story and are sung and heard by the characters on stage as actual music.[18] For example, in Bronsart's *Hiarne* the eponymous hero performs three songs: in the prelude he wins the Danish crown with a song that describes Frotho's triumphant arrival in Valhalla, while his rivals merely lament the king's demise. At the court of King Erich of Sweden, where Hiarne is disguised as his own skald in order to win Hilda, he performs 'Song of the Twilight of the Gods' to his own harp accompaniment. This song is modelled on the final quarter of *Völuspá* and refers in its opening lines to the seeress; it begins with the death of Baldur and describes the final battle until the conflagration of the world in stanzas designed to evoke

[18] For a general discussion of diegetic film music, see Neumeyer (2009). For the relationship of diegetic music and narrativity in opera, see Abbate (1991).

Nordic poetry with short lines and *stabreim*. Sometimes the German echoes precisely the Old Norse poem, especially the final stanza of the 'Twilight of the Gods' section that is modelled on stanza 57 of the original.

Table 4.2.3. Ingeborg von Bronsart, *Hiarne as skald*

Bronsart, *Hiarne*, 'Song of the Twilight of the Gods', stanza 8	***Völuspá*, stanza 57**
Schwarz wird die Sonne,	Sól tér sortna,
Die Erde sinkt ins Meer,	sígr fold í mar,
Herab vom Himmel fallen	hverfa af himni
Die hellen Sterne;	heiðar stiornor;
Gluthwirbel umwühlen	geisar eimi
Das ganze Weltall,	við aldrnara,
Bis es im Brande	leicr hár hiti
Zusammenbricht.	við himin siálfan.

As the poem turns to the rise of a new world, the poetic metre changes to modern end-rhyme with clear Christian connotations in the praise of the 'Almighty' and heavenly bliss on earth (von Bronsart 1891: 17–21). Finally, in Act IV after Hilda's suicide, Hiarne sings a commemorative song at her immolation; Friedleu is so moved that he hires Hiarne as his skald, which gives him in turn the opportunity for revenge. At every critical junction of the plot, therefore, a diegetic song drives the narrative, and Hiarne's outstanding qualities as a hero and as an artist are given ample scope for display. Considering the vital role of song in the original Danish history of King Hiarne, it is surprising that an earlier operatic take on the story, Heinrich Marschner's *König Hiarne und das Tyrfingschwert* (first performed in 1863), based on a text by Wilhelm Grothe, begins after Hiarne's election as king of Denmark and displaces the decisive song towards the end of the opera when Hiarne, disguised as an old skald, moves the heart of the rightful king Friedebrand, receives forgiveness for his usurpation of the throne and is united with his lover Asloga.[19]

Nevertheless, diegetic music plays an important role in Marschner's opera as a mouthpiece for the aesthetics of poet and composer. Many operas featuring singers — whether bards, troubadours or minnesingers — engage with contemporary discourses about the role of art in society and the dignity and value of the artist. Nordic skalds joined their voices to this chorus only relatively

[19] This version of the Hiarne saga is merged with the story of the sword Tyrfingr and based on Schoppe (1828).

late in the nineteenth century, almost a century after Ossianic and Germanic bards had become fashionable. While Hiarne's own song in Marschner's opera is strictly narrative, the first act features a brief discussion about the proper use of music and poetry. Hiarne's vassal Heröd and his skald try to cheer up their melancholy king, the latter with a rousing song that encourages Hiarne to jump on his dragon-ship, sail forth and bring home *Süße Beute wird errungen — Heldenarm um Mädchenleib* ('sweet booty — a hero's arm around a girl's body', Marschner 1883: 7), thus conforming to popular Viking stereotypes. Hiarne, however, rejects song and suggestion and chides the skald: music, as a gift of (a) God, should only be used in the service of the good and true, not desecrated by the lascivious and impure.

Table 4.2.4: Heinrich Marschner, *König Hiarne und das Tyrfingschwert*, act 1 scene 1

Hat ein Gott dir Sang verliehen, Daß du also ihn entweihst? Daß du goldne Melodien, Heil'gen Klang dem Frevel leihst? Nimmer bist du Bragas [!] Sohn, Sprichst du nord'scher Sitte Hohn!	Has a god given song to you so that you can profane it? That you give golden melodies, sacred sounds to sacrilege? You are never the son of Bragi, if you deride Nordic mores.

While this is a fairly conventional and straightforward nineteenth-century attitude, the poet-composer Peter Cornelius develops a complex ontology of music and poetry in his final, unfinished opera *Gunlöd* (1866–74, first performed 1891). After a long and fruitless search for a suitable operatic plot, he hit upon the story of the mead of poetry from the *Skáldskaparmál* section of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, mediated at first through the collection *Alkuna* by D. G. Th. Legis (Eichner 2012: 130–32). Cornelius soon became infatuated with the *Edda*: *Mein Trost ist die Edda, das schöne heilige Buch, strotzend von allem Nektar der Poesie* ('My consolation is the *Edda*, the beautiful, sacred book, rich with all the nectar of poetry', Cornelius 1904–05: II, 403), and he amazed the conductor Hans von Bülow by reciting *Völuspá* by heart (Cornelius 1904–05: 2, 513). Despite his intimate knowledge of the sources he transformed the rather violent and bawdy story of the creation and abduction of the mead of poetry into a high-minded paean to art and immortal love: Gunlöd has been abducted by Suttung, and now guards the mead of poetry in his cave. The giant wants to use the liquid to destroy the rule of the gods, but Gunlöd has vowed to preserve the mead until Odin himself calls for it. In the first act she finds herself torn between her budding love for the servant Bölwerk and her promise to wait for Odin, but happily realizes that they are identical and serves him the

mead. After Odin's return to Valhalla, Suttung wants to force Gunlöd into marriage, but as he tries to poison her she appeals to all-father and is elevated to the gods by a host of light-elves, where she again offers the mead to the gods.[20] The mead itself means entirely different things to each of the three protagonists: for Gunlöd it symbolizes love, for Odin the power of art and for Suttung it is a tool with which to overthrow the gods. In Gunlöd and Odin, love and art are united; according to Cornelius's first biographer, the artist interpreted the myth as art's unceasing struggle for the ideal combination of poetry and music, which could be dispensed only from the hands of a truly loving woman (Hasse 1922–23: II, 124). While this scenario had clearly biographical connotations for Cornelius, who was newly engaged when he embarked on the *Gunlöd* project, it also resonated with general nineteenth-century assumptions about creativity, notably with Richard Wagner's extolling of the role of *das Weib* for his creative output.

Love as the artist's inspiration is also a central theme in Max Schillings's opera *Ingwelde* (1894), though the skald Bran personifies an entirely different type of hero. Unlike the heroic Hiarne or the divine Bölwerk-Odin, Bran is an outcast from violent viking society, as the gentle and dreamy singer refuses to participate in the raids and fights of his brothers, the 'sons of Thorstein', who are the sworn enemies of the people of neighbouring Gladgard. However, when his brother Klaufe is killed through the betrayal of his unwilling wife Ingwelde of Gladgard, and Bran realizes that he unwittingly contributed to his death, he is transformed from passive artist to blood-thirsty avenger, driven to kill Ingwelde by the repeated exhortations of his brother's ghost. In the final act Bran slays Ingwelde's husband Gest, but his resolve falters when he raises his battle-axe to kill the woman he secretly loves. As Ingwelde is torn by remorse over her role in Klaufe's death, and Bran recognizes that his warrior-persona is a betrayal of his true artistic self, the two decide to die together in the style of Tristan and Isolde, *dass Liebe lösche des Schicksals Schuld, und Tod der Liebe Leid* ('so that love may extinguish the fateful guilt, and death the suffering of love!', Schillings n.d.: 173). Together they board the burning ship that carries Gest's body out to sea; it sinks as it collides with a ghost ship steered by the spectre of Klaufe, and 'voices from the sea' welcome Bran and Ingwelde into the abode of the sea gods, where they will finally find peace. This final scene is not merely a formidable challenge for any stage designer, but it also differs from the Valhalla-apotheoses in other operas, possibly due to the influence of the philo-

[20] For a Christian reading of this opera, see Eichner (2012: 134–38).

logist Wolfgang Golther who advised Schillings and his librettist Ferdinand Graf Sporck; his handbook of Nordic mythology (Golther 2003: 373–75) devotes a chapter to the sea goddess Rán and the happiness awaiting those who die at sea. The character of the skald Bran, however, was Sporck's and Schillings's original invention and not part of their sources. In the Old Norse *Svarfdæla Saga*, which forms the basis of the opera, its nineteenth-century summary in P. E. Müller's *Sagaenbibliotek* (translated by Karl Lachmann (1816)) and the narrative poem *Ingvelde* from Joseph Christian Freiherr von Zedlitz's collection *Altnordische Bilder* (1850), Bran is a fool who only stirs to action when driven by the ghostly apparition of his brother. Sporck and Schillings transformed him into a sensitive, dreamy artist estranged from society, who has to perish when he tries to conform to contemporary values. This idea owes less to the historical skalds (who, as court poets, were usually well integrated and highly esteemed) than to operatic precedents of artists who fail to conform to the expectations of their environment, notably Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. As Christian Detig has convincingly argued (1998: 63–68, 73–81), parallels between the role of the artist in the materialist and militaristic German Empire are intentional, and the fact that two more main characters from Schillings's later operas *Der Pfeifertanz* and *Moloch* are likewise estranged artists in conflict with society makes it likely that the figure of the skald held profound autobiographical connotations for the composer.

Schillings's *Ingwelde*, as a celebration of artistic individuality and sensitivity, stands in stark contrast to the image of the musician-warrior who was still popular with the singers of late-nineteenth-century male choirs. Towards the end of the century, several composers set to music a poem from Johann Gottfried Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* entitled 'Morgengesang im Kriege. Skaldisch', which in the hands of Heinrich Zöllner (1882) or Felix Woyrsch (1895) was transformed into a rousing battle hymn *Skaldischer Kriegsgesang* ('Skaldic Battle-Song'). By the turn of the century the skald as the embodiment of contemporary artistic ideas was apparently so well established that he even inspired an instrumental piece. Felix Woyrsch's violin concerto *Skaldische Rhapsodie* op. 50 (1904) makes ample use of harp-like arpeggios for the soloist and otherwise betrays its poetic inspiration in the titles of the three movements, 'Heldensage' ('Heroic Saga'), 'Ballade (Totenklage)' (Ballad, Lament') and 'Heimfahrt' ('Returning Home').

This brief survey offers only a glimpse of the nineteenth-century repertoire of musical works that were inspired, often in rather roundabout ways, by Nordic mythology in general and eddic poetry and saga in particular. With such a stylistic and generic diversity, ranging from Danish and Italian ballets to French

operas to English cantatas and German male choirs, it would be too much to expect a unified 'Nordic tone' in these works. Several composers attempted to convey a specific *couleur locale*, either through instrumentation (low brass for pagan rituals, harps for skalds), through archaizing harmonic language or through the use of traditional Scandinavian tunes, but most of these efforts remained at the surface level and did not penetrate the core of the composition. In Hartmann's ballet *Valkyrien*, for example, the hero's 'Gjallarhorn' was shaped like one of the recently discovered lurs, but in fact the sound came from a trombone in the orchestra pit (Grage 2011: 299). Ingeborg von Bronsart's opera *Hiarne* was praised explicitly for its use of Swedish folk-song melodies in Act 1 (Crusen 1892: 85), which seemed to lend a special authenticity to the scene because the composer was known to be of Swedish origin. However, the use of *couleur locale* for ensemble scenes like choruses or dances is typical of nineteenth-century operas and did not normally affect the musical language of the protagonists, who expressed their feelings in the general idiom of serious opera or oratorio. Furthermore, since practically nothing was (and very little still is) known about medieval Scandinavian music, composers were in no position to reconstruct an 'authentic' soundscape that would have conjured up the pre-Christian world of the North explicitly for their listeners — who were, in any case, not interested in sonic archaeology as long as the music vaguely indicated a chronologically or spatially remote location. Thus the 'Nordic' appeal of the compositions relied on their texts, staging, choreography and last but not least on their reception. Musical works on eddic themes tapped into nineteenth-century fashions for a heroic past that allowed artists and audiences to project their expectations and hopes onto the gods and heroes of the old North.

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4.3 – The Music of Jón Leifs

Florian Heesch

In the field of Western classical art music, the Icelander Jón Leifs (Jón Þorleifsson, 1899–1968) stands out as one of the most productive composers of music influenced by Old Norse literature and mythology in the twentieth century. Leifs wrote musical pieces on texts from the Poetic Edda and *Snorra Edda* in a wide range of instrumentations and genres, partly in monumental dimensions, including several *Edda* oratorios and a large dance drama, *Baldr*. After a long period of little acceptance in his home country, he has recently been established as one of Iceland's internationally most famous composers. Since the 1990s his music has gained post-mortem success with some premier performances and recordings. Today, scores and recordings are easily available, and two extensive biographies (Åhlén 2002; Árni Heimir Ingólfsson 2009) and further scholarly articles have been published in recent years.

Thus far, the prerequisites for any open-minded approach to Leifs's music are easy, taking into consideration his definitely idiosyncratic, modern style that might be surprising, if not challenging, for new listeners, although it has indeed attracted some new, non-classical audiences in the context of its recent rediscovery, maybe at least partly due to the fascinating, sometimes sheer tumultuous percussion parts in some orchestral pieces. For instance, his composition *Hekla*, inspired by and descriptive of an eruption of the eponymous Icelandic

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volcano, has been featured on a CD compilation including 'the loudest classical music of all time' (*Earquake* 1997; cf. Jón Leifs 1998/1999). Looking beyond ascriptions of artistic originality, any thorough scholarly approach to Leifs's appropriation of Old Norse sources has to deal not only with his editing of the texts and with aesthetic aspects of their musical transformation, but also with a range of aesthetic, ideological and political backgrounds that inform these highly idiosyncratic cross-media products.

The point here is not to declare the composer's intentions as crucial for any understanding of his products, however sure we may be of such intentions even retrospectively. Rather, there are some stylistic aspects that might be easier to grasp in their singularity when taking into account the composer's concept of how literature, music, nature and a certain picture of Iceland or the North are linked together. Furthermore, any historical approach cannot overlook Leifs's complicated relationship to nationalistic thinking on music and even to the system and ideology of National Socialism, given that he lived and worked mostly in Germany from 1916 until 1944. To the extent that the reception history of Norse mythology includes some problematic links not only to National Socialism but to right-wing ideology in general, it is necessary to discuss Leifs's relationship to these ideological strands when dealing with his music on Eddic literature.

This chapter describes Leifs's characteristic ways of transforming Old Norse literature, analysing examples from specific pieces. The chapter will also discuss the composer's concept of Nordic art and the relation between his approach to Eddic mythology and nature.[1]

Transformations of Eddic Texts

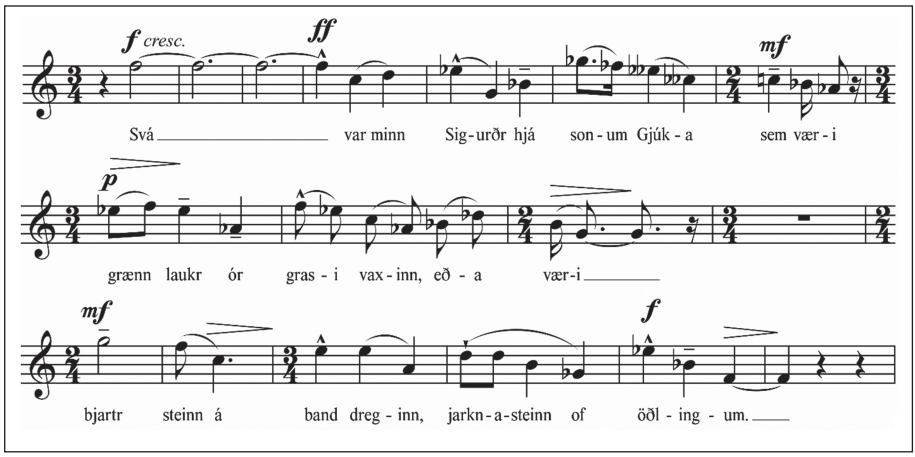
Early in his career as a composer, Leifs started to set excerpts from the Poetic Edda to music, namely in *Þrjú erindi úr Hávamálum* ('Three Stanzas from *Hávamál*', English title: *Three Songs of the Edda*) for tenor or soprano voice and piano, op. 4 (1924). These aphoristic song miniatures, comprising no more than eighteen to twenty-two bars with a duration of about 1.5 minutes each, are based on three pieces of wisdom from *Sayings of the High One*, stanzas 15, 47

[1] I have discussed some of these aspects in detail in a previous article (Heesch 2016), in particular Leifs's first Edda oratorio *The Creation of the World*, his concept of 'Norman' art, based on a North-South dualism, together with reflections on the connection of nature and culture. However, the present chapter provides an original overview and the sections about Leifs's songs, *Guðrúnarkviða* and *Baldr* are entirely new interpretations.

and 76.[2] In 1933, another pair of songs for tenor and piano followed with *Ástarvísur úr Eddu* (English title: *Two Songs of the Edda*), op. 18b, each almost three times longer than the earlier songs. These 'Lovesongs' (so the Icelandic title translated) are based on stanzas from *För Skírnis* ('Skírnir's Journey', also called *Skírnismál*), an eddic poem about the god Freyr who sent his servant Skírnir to woo a giant's daughter on his behalf. Whereas Leifs set the eddic stanzas to music in a simple, unchanged way in the op. 4 songs, he now chose to expand the text by repeating certain lines, thus adding some kind of refrain. The first song in op. 18b is based on the last stanza (42) of *För Skírnis*; that stanza's incipit *Löng er nótt* ('Long is night') is repeated at the end. The second song includes two stanzas of the poem (6 and 7), in which the second one's second half is replaced by the second half of the first one, which thus becomes the refrain: *armar lýstu, enn af þaðan alt lopt oc lǫgr* ('arms shone and from them all the water and air'). In that way, Leifs emphasizes the lyrical structure and extends the two songs at the same time. Characteristically, he would not just repeat the refrains musically, but rather composed variations that clearly contrast melodically with the other, non-repeated text passages while at the same time fulfilling some dramaturgic progression toward the end of each song.

When Leifs started to compose much larger, even monumental pieces on eddic texts in the 1930s, he developed an idiosyncratic collage style of arranging diverse excerpts from the Poetic Edda as well as from *Snorra Edda*. His *Ástarvísur úr Eddu* op. 18b may be considered as a first step in this development to the extent that Leifs basically remains true to the principle of not changing any wording of the pre-texts but rearranges stanzas or single lines into librettos with enhanced lyrical structures. A second important priniciple of his collage style involves the collection of scattered pieces from different texts by following a certain topic. That idea may actually shine through op. 18b inasmuch as Leifs chose only such stanzas from the poem that can be read as expressions of loving desire. However, Leifs's composition *Guðrúnarkviða* op. 22, composed in 1940, reveals that principle in a much more straightforward way. It is interesting to take a closer look at that piece for two reasons at least. First, *Guðrúnarkviða* illustrates Leifs's broader interest in eddic poetry, encompassing not only the mythological texts in a narrow sense but also the heroic lays. Second, that orchestral piece for solo voice bridges the gap between the small

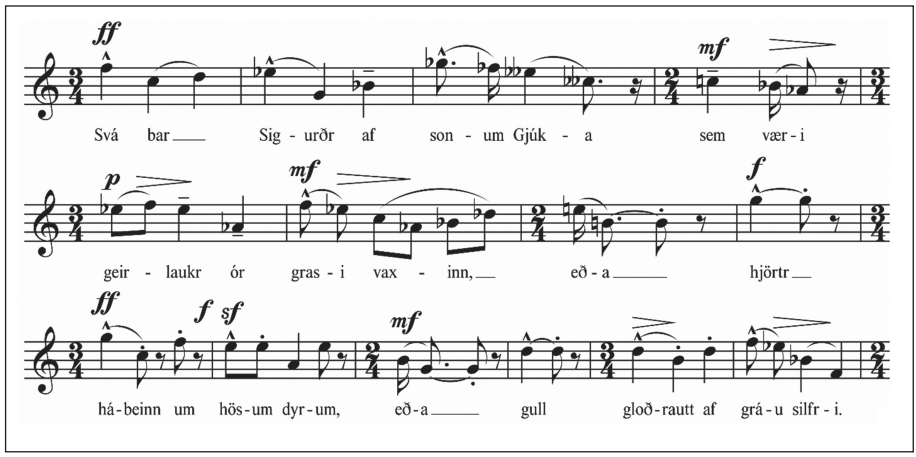
[2] All musical settings of texts in Old Norse from eddic poems have been compared with the edition *NK*. For excerpts from *Snorra Edda* I have consulted the edition of Finnur Jónsson (1931) and quoted it by page and line number.



Music Example 4.3.1. Vocal part from Jón Leifs, *Guðrúnarkviða* (bars 182–98), based on *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta*, stanza 18. English translation: 'So was my Sigurd, beside the sons of Giuki, | as if a leek were grown up out of the grass, | or a bright jewel threaded onto a string, | a precious gem, among the nobles' (Larrington 2014: 174).

and intimate songs on the one hand and, on the other, the large forms of multi-movement oratorios (*Edda I–III*) and a stage drama (*Baldr*), that stand out as Leifs's monumental eddic compositions.

Guðrúnarkviða is a piece for mezzo-soprano, tenor, bass and orchestra with a time length of about eleven to twelve minutes, slightly varying on account of differing interpretations (compare recordings in Jón Leifs 1999a; Jón Leifs 2000). As the title suggests, the text of the composition is related to eddic poetry about the heroic character of Guðrún. Readers familiar with the Poetic Edda might wonder which of the three poems called *Guðrúnarkviða* (simply distinguished as 'The First, Second and Third Lays of Gudrun') has been used. Trying to answer that query leads to Leifs's characteristic way of appropriating Old Icelandic literature by focusing on a relatively narrow topic taken from one source and rearranging quotations from different texts into a new collage about that topic. In this case the chosen topic is Guðrún's grief about the death of her husband Sigurðr, who was killed as a result of a conspiracy by her brothers. The eddic *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta* ('The First Lay of Gudrun') in particular presents Guðrún's grief by displaying a dramatic scene. At first, she is depicted as different from other grieving widows inasmuch as she would not cry for a long time; then, several women try to comfort her by telling of their own fateful experiences; afterwards, Guðrún herself, now having started to cry when she sees the unveiled body of Sigurðr, utters an extensive lament. The poem continues with



Music Example 4.3.2. Vocal part from Jón Leifs, *Guðrúnarkviða* (bars 218–31), based on *Guðrúnarkviða önnor*, stanza 2. English translation: 'So towered Sigurd over the sons of Giuki | like a green leek grown up out of the grass, | or a long-legged stag above the sharp-eyed beasts, | or red-glowing gold next to dull silver' (Larrington 2014: 191).

a quarrel between Brynhildr, who is accused by Guðrún of being the source of Sigurðr's bad fate, and the other women present, concluding with a prose remark on Brynhildr's suicide. Leifs sets fourteen stanzas of *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta* nearly unmodified to music (stanzas 1–3, 5, 6, 8, 11–16, 18, 20), but he excludes the whole passage about Brynhildr. Instead, he prolongs Guðrún's lament by quoting stanzas from three other eddic poems that also include utterances of Guðrún's grief: five stanzas from *Guðrúnarkviða önnor* ('The Second Lay of Gudrun', stanzas 2, 11, 5, 12, 44), one from *Hamðismál* ('The Lay of Hamðir', stanza 5) and one from *Guðrúnarhvöt* ('The Whetting of Gudrun', stanza 19). In that way Leifs's collage not only presents a certain reading of the different poems with a focus on the topic of Guðrún's grief or, more precisely, expressions of that grief: it highlights certain similarities in wording. For instance, when Leifs quotes stanzas 18 and 20 from *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta*, followed by stanza 2 from *Guðrúnarkviða önnor*, the latter 'reads' like a kind of varied refrain because it is partly identical with or a variation of stanza 18 from *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta*. That connection is even expressed musically, namely as a similarity of the sung melody (Music Examples 4.3.1 and 4.3.2), wherein the orchestration differs clearly between the two parts. Furthermore, Leifs frames these three stanzas with orchestral interludes, dominated by percussive sounds, thus shaping a relatively closed interior part within the whole piece that is mainly characterized by the refrain collaged from two different eddic poems.

Further musical strategies to structure the whole piece and make it almost a dramatic scene involve the parts of the three singers. Of these, the two male voices share the first half of the composition. Although both often sing together, particularly in highly expressive moments, the bass mostly sings the narrative or descriptive parts while the tenor performs the appearances of the women Herborg and Gullrönd who try to comfort Guðrún. When Guðrún herself, performed by the mezzosoprano, lifts her (female) voice on a high, loud and prolonged tone (bars 182–85, see Music Example 4.3.1) no earlier than after an almost turbulent instrumental interlude (including loudly played drums and strings in *col legno* manner) at the end of the first half of the piece, that very moment expressively illustrates her lamenting presence after keeping silent for a long time. The characteristic grief-stricken silence of Guðrún, described in *Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta* stanza 1, is quoted almost identically in *Guðrúnarkviða önnor* stanza 11, although that time not in third-person perspective but from Guðrún's own point of view: *gerðig at hjúfra, né höndum sláa, né kveina um sem konor aðrar* (quoted as in Leifs' score; English translation: 'I could not weep nor strike my hands together, nor lament my man as other women do', Larrington 2014: 192). Leifs adopts that intertextual relationship by integrating the latter stanza into Guðrún's part where it refers back to the first-mentioned stanza which has been repeatedly sung by bass and tenor. Thus, once again, he shapes a kind of varied refrain.

Even though much more could be said about the musical character of the piece, it is at least worth mentioning how expressively Leifs illustrates different shades of grief. The range includes highly dramatic, even almost noisy moments, as already mentioned, but also very calm passages at the beginning as well as in the second part with Guðrún's performance. For the first couple of minutes, violins are almost inaudible. By this means Leifs makes use of a characteristically grief-stricken sound: namely, that of low-tuned strings. A highly canonical example for that semantic connotation within the context of Western classical art music can be seen in Johannes Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, op. 45 ('A German Requiem', premiere 1868), that excludes violins from its whole first movement. Leifs clearly refers to that culturally established association of death and grief with the low-tuned string sound in the beginning, thus adding an interesting musical colour to his topic-focused collage about Guðrún.

Even before *Guðrúnarkviða*, Leifs completed an oratorio that was intended to be the first in a monumentally conceptualized cycle of four *Edda* oratorios. *Edda I — Sköpun heimsins* ('Creation of the World'), op. 20, was composed between 1935 and 1939; *Edda II — Líf guðanna* ('Life of the Gods'), op. 42, was finished in 1966; *Edda III — Ragnarökr* ('Twilight of the Gods'), op. 65,

remained a fragment at the time of Leifs's death; the fourth part, *Endurreisn* ('Resurrection') only exists as a libretto. As the titles suggest, Leifs approaches eddic mythology, too, in his systematic, topic-focused way. However, the dimensions are far larger than in *Guðrúnarkviða*: in deference to that fact, the plurality of topics and the amount and heterogenity of relevant textual sources are much more complex in these mythological oratorios. For instance, *Edda I* includes thirteen movements, each about a certain aspect of the creation of the world:[3]

1. Ár var alda [Young Were the Years]
2. Ymir
3. Þursa þjóðar sjöt [The Giants' Palace]
4. Auðhumla, Óðinn ok hans bræðr
   [Audhumla, Odin and his Brothers]
5. Sær [Sea]
6. Jörð [Earth]
7. Himinn, sól, dagr [Sky, Sun, Day]
8. Nótt, morgunn [Night, Morning]
9. Ásgarðr, Askr ok Embla, Miðgarðr
   [Asgard, Ash and Embla, Midgard]
10. Scherzo: Allir menn urðut jafnspakir
    [All Men Aren't Equally Wise] (elves and dwarves)
11. Viðr, sumar, logn [Wood, Summer, Calm]
12. Vetr og vindr [Winter and Wind]
13. Finale: Ífing, níu heimar [Ifing, Nine Worlds]

The oratorio starts with the primordial abyss *ginnungagap*, introduced with words of the Old Norse creation narrative, *Ár var alda* (i.e., 'in old days'), included in the eddic poem *Völuspá* ('The Seeress's Prophecy', stanza 3) as well as in Snorri's *Edda* (*Gylfaginning* 4 [3]). Afterwards, the different movements are devoted to the diverse creatures, places and elements involved in or resulting from the creation process. The lyrics in each movement are arranged as collages from diverse eddic poems and excerpts from *Snorra Edda*, with regard to

[3] The English versions of the titles are quoted from the album liner notes in Jón Leifs 2007.

the respective topic. For instance, the fifth movement *Sær* ('Sea') combines quotations from *Gylfaginning* ('The Tricking of Gylfi') and *Skáldskaparmál* ('The Language of Poetry'), both from *Snorra Edda*, as well as from the eddic poems *Vafþrúðnismál* ('Vafthrudnir's Sayings') and *Alvíssmál* ('All-Wise's Sayings'), all of these connected by their reference to the topic of the sea. Snorri's version of the creation myth serves not only as an additional source but even as a structural model. While in the Poetic Edda elements of the creation myth are scattered in diverse poems where they often appear in combination with other mythological aspects like the end of the world, Snorri provides a rather systematic and chronological narrative. At the same time, Snorri's narrations tend to be relatively short; for instance, he narrates the creation of the sea in a single sentence (*Gylfaginning* 5 [8]). Leifs appropriates Snorri's model inasmuch as he follows its chronological, systematic order and its way of quoting verses from the Poetic Edda. However, he modifies that practice of quotation by arranging new discrete poetic sections and thus expanding the rather short accounts found in Snorri into lyrical pieces. In conclusion, Leifs's appropriation of mythological sources in his *Edda* oratorios draws extensively from eddic poems as well as from Snorri's *Edda*. While the latter provides the basis for a systematic order, the composition is extended in an intensified lyrical way by the use of stanzas from the poems.

The text resulting from that procedure is sung by a choir as well as (in the case of *Edda I*) by two soloists, bass and tenor. It is important to note that Leifs does not ascribe to the solo voices the role of a narrator or another character, as often happens in the oratorio tradition. Instead, he often combines the two voices in a way similar to the traditional Icelandic style of *tvísöngvar* ('duets') by frequent voice leadings in parallel fifths.

Monumental dimensions are also characteristic of Leifs's stage work *Baldr*, op. 34, in two acts, composed between 1943 and 1947 and published as a score in 1958. The second title of the piece, *músikdrama án orða* ('musical drama without words'), might lead to false assumptions because the composition does include some textual passages: two prologues, spoken by a 'skald' before each act, and some passages from the eddic poems *Lokasenna* ('Loki's Quarrel') and *Völuspá* ('The Seeress's Prophecy') as well as from Snorri's *Gylfaginning*, sung by a solo voice (tenor), representing Óðinn, and partly by the choir. However, the largest part of the drama is indeed a performative representation without words, centred around the god Baldr, who invigorates the primordially primitive pre-human creatures into real humans, falls in love with Nanna and whose tragic death shakes the world and the gods. Obviously, in that piece Leifs chose

a basically different way of transforming eddic mythology into music than in the aforementioned vocal compositions. It would be a space-consuming task to analyse the relationship between eddic sources and the stage performance of the drama in detail. For the purpose of this overview, it may suffice to mention some basic and exemplary aspects.

The main strands of the plot are taken from eddic sources, in particular from those passages in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* that include the most detailed accounts of Baldr. The mostly pantomimic performance of the plot is acted out by actors, dancers and sportsmen, partly representing eddic gods or mythic beings like the Fenris wolf or the Midgard serpent, as well as personifications of illnesses and elements of nature. A child dancer performs the branch of mistletoe that will become the only weapon capable of killing Baldr. A group of dancers, representing the 'creatures of the earth, who become human' (Leifs 1958, 'Cast', without page number), is a noticeably new aspect compared to the mythological sources. By showing this primordial and primitive mass of creatures in their encounter with the gods, Leifs stages the powers of Loki on the one side, which are clearly characterized as chaotic and evil, and the good, light and humanizing powers of Baldr on the other. On the level of sound, one of the most striking aspects of the *Baldr* drama is its orchestration, requiring a giant orchestra that includes a large percussion part, that, apart from the usual instruments, consists of shields of wood, leather and iron, anvils, wooden hammers, stones, theatre pistols and iron chains. This equipment used to produce a structured tumult has its entry at the end of the second act, when the catastrophe of Baldr's death results in a volcanic eruption. Furthermore, the divine voice of Óðinn sings through large megaphones from behind the stage, accompanied by 'Old Nordic "lurs"', that can 'be replaced by other natural wind instruments' in practice (Leifs 1958a, Orchestra).

This overview of some of Leifs's musical transformations of Old Norse myths and heroic lays has been necessarily selective. It might have shown that there are interesting observations to be made with regard to relationships between eddic literature and music with many open questions remaining, not least concerning further compositions like Leifs's *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* ('The Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani') for alto, bass and chamber orchestra op. 61, composed in 1964, or his *Grógaldr* ('Gróa's Chant') for alto, tenor and orchestra, op. 62, composed in 1965, that have not been mentioned so far. However, it is no less important to take questions of historical context and ideological concepts into consideration, and these will be discussed in the following sections.

Concepts of the North

The choice of Old Norse literature as a ground for musical composition can never be simply 'natural', even in the case of a composer from Iceland. In the case of Jón Leifs, things are complicated because he built up his musical career in Germany, thus being confronted with certain ideological perspectives on Norse mythology. Leifs expressed his own position about that complicated relationship and he even developed his own concept of Nordic art and Nordic music. The following section will shed light on these historical and ideological backgrounds by recapitulating the relevant biographical aspects, summarizing Leifs's critique against National Socialism that he expressed in some of his compositions, and discussing his concept of modern Nordic art in its complex relationship with his encounter with German music, musicology and politics.

Like many ambitious contemporary musicians from Northern Europe, Leifs headed to the European continent to study music. In 1916 he went to the Leipzig Conservatory, which had become the central place for musicians from the Nordic countries since its foundation by Felix Mendelssohn in 1843 (cf. Öhrström 1997: 234; Herresthal 1997). Leifs fell in love with a fellow student, the pianist Annie Riethof (1897–1970), who became his first wife in 1921. They started musical careers and a family together. Apart from tours and some extended stays in Iceland, Leifs lived with his family in several places in Germany until 1944. After Adolf Hitler's takeover in 1933, Leifs experienced his relationship to the National Socialists in diverse, partly conflicting ways.[4] As a Scandinavian with a particular ambition to develop an art culture of and in the North, Leifs seemed to have had more open doors for his musical career as a conductor and composer than before. His compositions were published by Kistner & Siegel of Leipzig in 1933. Leifs could certainly identify with the notion of a Nordic-Germanic Germany, as an excerpt from a letter, written in 1933, shows. He openly expresses sympathy with Alfred Rosenberg's and Adolf Hitler's ideas:

> Ich habe, kurz gesagt, ernste Sorge um die kulturelle Verbindung zwischen dem Norden und Deutschland, — zuerst weil man immer noch nicht deutlich erkennen kann, dass das neue Deutschland nordisch-germanisch gerichtet sein soll. Die

[4] Cf. Árni Heimir Ingólfsson (2009: 175–247); see also Åhlén (2001), especially for his references to important original sources. Åhlén's interpretations include some criticism of Leifs's partial sympathizing with National Socialist ideology, although he tends to emphasize his obvious sympathy for the *kompositör i motvind* ('composer experiencing headwind').

> Hoffnungen, die z. B. Rosenbergs Mythus und die kulturpolitische Rede des Führers in Nürnberg bei uns Nordländern erweckten, sind noch unerfüllt.[5]
>
> (In short, I am seriously concerned about the cultural connection between the North and Germany, — firstly, because it still cannot be clearly seen that the new Germany must be oriented in a Nordic-Germanic way. The hopes that for example Rosenberg's Myth and the Führer's politico-cultural speech in Nuremberg aroused in us Northerners are still unaccomplished.

In the following years, Leifs's music was performed more often than before, by, among others, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, which devoted one of its concerts in 1936 to the music of Leifs and Richard Wagner. However, it became increasingly difficult for him and his family to live and work in Germany, in particular because his wife suffered from oppression because of her Jewish origins. Around 1940, the differences between the official Nazi culture and Leifs's modernist aesthetic became increasingly obvious, culminating in harsh criticism by audiences and critics after a performance of his *Organ Concerto* op. 7 in Berlin in 1941. Finally, Leifs's music was banned from being performed, and he became isolated. In 1944 the Leifs family finally succeeded in emigrating to Sweden. After divorcing Annie Riethof, Jón Leifs returned to Iceland in 1945.[6]

Leifs expressed his explicitly critical position towards National Socialism verbally as well as in his music while still in Germany. The vocal composition *Guðrúnarkviða*, explored above, was written as a critical reaction against the German occupation of Norway and Denmark in 1940, which increased Leifs's fear of a Nazi occupation of Iceland. He left no doubt of his intention by noting in a preface to the composition: 'For 20 years I had been planning a composition to the *Lay of Gudrun*, but it was this event, so distressing for the Icelandic people, that made me realize my plans. The piece was composed in honour of the unknown Norwegian soldier' (quoted in Árni Heimir Ingólfsson 1999). From this perspective, the topic of Guðrún's grief, expressed in verbal as well as in musical manners, may be interpreted allegorically with regard to the contemporary situation of war.

[5] Jón Leifs, letter to Thilo von Trotha, 23 November 1933, quoted in Árni Heimir Ingólfsson (2009: 390). 'Rosenberg's Myth' refers to Alfred Ernst Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (Munich: Hoheneichen 1930).

[6] Thanks to Hilmar Oddson's internationally successful movie *Tears of Stone* (1995), a biographical portrait of Jón Leifs, a relatively broad audience knows the dramatic story of how the composer and his family left Nazi Germany.

Leifs's stage piece *Baldr*, too, was inspired by World War II and includes a critical element. The preface to *Baldr* is strikingly similar to that of *Guðrúnarkviða* inasmuch as Leifs again refers to his twenty-year-old preoccupation with eddic literature that emerged as an impulse to start the composition no earlier than when he was confronted with the war: 'This work is based on an idea originating twenty years ago and inspired by the Elder Edda. The events of the Second World War and the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Hekla provided ideas for the final dramatic form of the work' (Leifs 1958a: 'Author's Preface'). The darkness and violence of war is even depicted aesthetically, particularly in the character of Loki. In the fourth scene of Act I, Loki unleashes a violent hurricane above Baldr and Nanna, obviously on purpose to destroy their happiness. At that point, the stage directions describe Loki as being mad with revenge. While evoking storm and lightning, Loki himself starts to grow monstrously until his shape recalls *schwarze Adler nationaler Wappen* ('black eagles of national coats of arms') (Leifs 1958b: 98). As Árni Heimir Ingólfsson (2009: 254) argues, that militaristic depiction of Loki may be interpreted as a *persónúgerving Þýskalands* ('personification of Germany'), with regard to the historical context and Leifs's critical position expressed in the preface.

Leifs's critique against the National Socialists also informed his book *Islands künstlerische Anregung: Bekenntnisse eines nordischen Musikers* ('Iceland's Artistic Challenge: Confessions of a Nordic Musician'), a personal account of his encounter with Central European culture and the presentation of his concept of a Nordic, especially an Icelandic, art. He had sketched the first hundred pages of the manuscript already in 1940 and 1941, after his shock caused by the German invasion of Denmark and Norway. In a note to the introduction, Leifs declares that one of his main personal motivations for writing the book was to show the difference between his own concept of the North and the National Socialists' attempts to impose their idea of a Nordic (*nordisch*) culture that included their control of Iceland and the other Nordic countries (Leifs 1951: 7–8). He states that he showed the manuscript to German authorities only to receive the expected reply that its publication was undesirable in Germany. Completed in Stockholm in 1945, the book was published by Islandia Edition, Reykjavík, in 1951, probably at Leifs's own expense (cf. Åhlén 2002: 164).

Interestingly, Leifs also distanced himself from the music of Richard Wagner, but he did not simply conflate that critique with his critique against the Nazis and their blatant affinity to Wagner. According to Leifs, Wagner failed to transfer the characteristic alliterations of Old Norse poetry into his German-language opera tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Leifs 1951: 36).

Leifs's own monumental pieces on eddic texts can indeed be considered deliberate alternatives to the operatic products of a composer whom Leifs saw as a typical 'Southern' rather than a 'Northern' artist (Leifs 1951: 60, 75). At that point, it becomes clear that Leifs's own concept of Nordic art is based on some debatable ideological assumptions.

Although Leifs distanced himself clearly from Nazi politics, at least around 1940, his own notions of ideal Nordic art and culture cannot be described as wholly contrary to German nationalistic ideology. As Pamela Potter (2000: 207) has shown, in the 1920s Leifs was one of those interested academics who tried to collect empirical proof for hypotheses by scholars like Oskar Fleischer and Hans Joachim Moser, according to whom the music of the Germanic people stands out as singular, innovative and even superior to other music. Leifs's ethnological research on Icelandic folk melodies led him to the observation that these reveal *zweifelsohne Merkmale urgermanischer Männlichkeit* ('without doubt features of primordial Germanic masculinity').[7] Moreover, his very concept of Nordic art is clearly inspired by Moser's music history, which argued for an essentialist continuity from the Germanic to German culture based on a notion of inheritance that was explicitly *völkisch* ('nationalistic') (Heesch 2016). In Moser, Leifs could also find a model for his own dualistic concept of 'Norman' or North-Western art and culture as different from South-Eastern culture, although such dualistic stereotypes were prevalent already in the nineteenth century. For instance, in Leifs's scheme, the clumsy but straight 'Norman' culture contrasts with the elastic and sneaky culture of the South. It is important to note that Leifs endeavours to show the positive and negative characteristics of both sides of the duality; furthermore, he emphasizes his critical position against blatant cultural racism (Leifs 1951: 30). Nevertheless, his idealistic view of Nordic culture draws undeniably on essentialist notions. It is certainly no simplifying or anachronistic call for political correctness to criticize the affirmative use of the attributes *völkisch* or *arisch* ('Aryan') in his book (Leifs 1951: 18, 94, 103), because he clearly makes use of essentialist *völkisch* arguments to prove his characterization of the allegedly 'Norman' art and culture. For instance, according to his observation about the contemporary situation, *sind wir Nordländer alle mehr oder weniger artgeschwächt, unserem Ursprung entglitten* ('all we Nordic people are more or less degraded in our kinship, slipped from our origins') (Leifs 1951: 95); hence the

[7] Jón Leifs, 'Isländische Volksmusik und germanische Empfindungsart', in *Die Musik* 16 (1923), 45, quoted in Potter (2000: 270).

challenge would be the following: *In einer uns ursprünglich fremden aber heute vertraut gewordenen Welt müssen wir erst zu den ursprünglichen aber verdeckten Quellen der eignen Art tastend zurückfinden* ('In a world that was primordially foreign, but has become familiar to us, we have to get back tentatively to the primordial but concealed sources of our own kinship' (Leifs 1951: 100). The implicit racism becomes even clearer when Leifs touches upon topics relating to African, Afro-American or Jewish culture. While he attempts to show his Nordic ideal in a non-exclusive light by generously ascribing the ability to produce 'Norman' art even to non-Nordic people, he explicitly does not include non-white people: *Wahrscheinlich aber wird es unter allen weissen Völkern der Erde Menschen geben, die zum Schaffen und Nachschaffen in dieser [normannischen] Richtung fähig sind* ('Probably, there are humans among all white people of the earth, who are able to create and emulate in that [Norman] direction', Leifs 1951: 101–02). In this context, it should not be overlooked that Leifs, who regularly published his scores not only in Icelandic but in the German language, called the above-mentioned group of 'creatures of the earth, who become human' in *Baldr Untermenschen* ('Inferior humans') in the German version of the score (Leifs 1958b), hence making use of a term that was common in Nazi Germany for racist descriptions of allegedly lower human people. Although Leifs definitely did not use the term in the racist way of the Nazis, its inclusion in his dramatic concept illustrates the relative closeness of his distance from their ideology and terminology.

When enquiring into Leifs's motivations and the ideological notions that informed his musical appropriations of Old Norse literature, we encounter a complex picture of an indeed independent thinker who was one of very few of his time to develop an ambitious concept of modern Icelandic art, but who was also clearly inspired by and not completely against essentialist notions of Nordic culture that were widespread in Germany during the time he lived there. As the next section will show, his ideas of Icelandic art and identity are also strongly inspired by images of Icelandic nature.

Mythology and Nature

One of Leifs's most popular orchestral pieces is the above-mentioned *Hekla* op. 52, inspired by the eponymous Icelandic volcano that the composer witnessed erupting in 1947. Though Hekla might represent a record in orchestral loudness, it is not the only one of Leifs's compositions depicting natural phenomena. Three further orchestral pieces are dedicated to idiosyncratic features of

Icelandic nature: *Geysir* op. 51 (that name being identical with the phenomenon), *Dettifoss* op. 57 (named after the waterfall) and *Havís* op. 63 ('Drift Ice'). However, the stage drama *Baldr* included Leifs's first version of a musical (and dramatic) performance of Hekla's volcanic eruption, although the orchestral piece *Hekla* is an independent composition with a clearly extended representation (in time as well as in sound) of the eruptive process. Moreover, it goes without saying that nature plays a central role in Leifs's first *Edda* oratorio, *The Creation of the World*. Indeed, in his view Norse mythology is closely connected to images of the Nordic landscapes. Generally speaking, musical depictions of landscapes formed a characteristic tradition in all Nordic countries that includes Leifs as well as composers like Hugo Alfvén (Sweden), Niels W. Gade (Denmark), Edvard Grieg (Norway) or Jean Sibelius (Finland) (cf. Schwab 2001). Nevertheless, in Leifs's imagination that connection was even associated with the medium of literature, too, at least in the case of Iceland. That becomes obvious from several passages in his book, for example: *Grundlage aller kulturellen Betrachtung Islands und des Nordens ist die alt-isländische Literatur.* [...] *[V]oll verstehen lässt sie sich erst aus der eigentlichen Ursprungs-Landschaft Island und den dortigen Verhältnissen heraus* ('The basis of all cultural consideration of Iceland and the North is the Old-Icelandic literature. [...] The only way towards a complete understanding of this literature is by considering the real primordial landscape of Iceland and its local conditions') (Leifs 1951: 11). In another passage he connects eddic myths directly with Icelandic nature:

> Die Vorstellungen der Edda von der Welterschaffung tragen denn auch isländischen Charakter: Berge und Meer, tobende Stürme, jagende Wolken, blasse unverrückbar hängende Dämmerung, Wasserfälle, Gletscherflüsse und Gletscher, schwarze Lava, auch die so frühlingsmässig ewig frischen grünenden Wiesen und schliesslich die in endlose Fernen klare und ausgedehnte Sicht. Das berühmteste Gedicht 'Völuspá' kann als Schilderung eines Vulkanausbruches betrachtet werden. Auch Sigurds Ritt durch das Feuer deutet auf Vulkanisches. (Leifs 1951: 12)
>
> (The images of the creation of the world, as they are told in the Edda, have an Icelandic character: mountains and sea, raging storms, hunting clouds, pale immovably suspended twilight, waterfalls, glacial streams and glaciers, black lava, even the meadows so eternally fresh green as in springtime, and finally, the endless clear and vast prospect. The most famous poem 'Völuspá' ['The Seeress's Prophecy'] can be seen as the depiction of a volcanic eruption. Sigurd's ride through the fire also points at something volcanic.)

When Leifs depicted natural elements in his music, he did not only use conventional techniques like imitating natural sounds, movements or atmospheres, but

he even included natural (or almost natural) materials. For instance, his musical transformations of volcanic eruptions not only demand an immense symphony orchestra but also stones and loud noises produced by wooden objects. A large wooden hammer (*legno grande*) had already been used by Gustav Mahler at a climax of his sixth symphony. Leifs's own use of that rough 'instrument' may be part of his striving for even more monumental sounds. In that way he included the *legno grande* in *Guðrúnarkviða*, and, indeed as an illustration of natural turmoil, in the volcanic eruption scene of *Baldr*. However, he stages two different pieces of wood in *Edda I* to depict the creation of the two first human beings, Askr and Embla, from tree trunks, thus connecting the represented mythological content to an almost natural sound effect.

Leifs's creation oratorio is of particular interest here again, because it illustrates the complexity of the composer's approach to Norse mythology. As I have shown in my previous article on Leifs (Heesch 2016), the oratorio clearly expresses a binary opposition of earth and sea. Such dualism is rather compatible with the creation narrative found in Genesis 1. 10, and thus with the example of Joseph Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* ('The Creation') and the genre tradition closely connected to the performance of biblical subjects, than in marking a certain non-Christian Norse approach. The Poetic Edda and *Snorra Edda* do not express a comparable binary opposition between land and sea. Therefore, Leifs's music about creation is not only inspired by Norse mythology but to a certain extent even by the land-sea opposition, common in Western culture, that is grounded in a Christian tradition.

Conclusion

Musical appropriations of Norse mythology and heroic lays form an important and manifold part within Jón Leifs's musical oeuvre. The composer developed an idiosyncratic approach to transforming Old Norse textual sources into collages with highlighted lyrical elements, appropriate for a musical setting. Leifs's relation to eddic literature is motivated by his ambitious concept of developing a Nordic, particularly Icelandic, modern art. His commitment to that aim does not only show in his writings but had sustained effects through his involvement in founding the Tónskáldafélag Íslands ('Icelandic Composers' Society') in 1945 and the Icelandic copyright society STEF in 1948. Although he distanced himself from the German Nazi powers in the 1940s, he remained ideologically close to some essentialist notions of *völkisch* Nordic culture with which he was involved as a consequence of his intellectual education and participation in German society in the 1920s. Thus his approaches to Norse

mythology are inspired by his attempt to create a Nordic art, based on essentialist, non-inclusive views of culture, inherited by 'white' people, at their best with Scandinavian ancestors. While Leifs did not express any significant interest in the revival of Norse paganism, he connected his ideal of Nordic culture to the characteristics of Icelandic nature.

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Part 5

The Reception in Theatre and Performance

5.1 – Theatre and Performance (1830–2018)

Terry Gunnell and Sveinn Einarsson

Authors wishing to write plays on Old Nordic topics as part of the Romantic National movement that was sweeping across Northern Europe in the mid-nineteenth century (see Leerssen 2013 and 2014) had many more accessible sources than their predecessors from the previous two centuries (see Chapter 6.1 in Volume I).[1] Fine editions of the original texts of the eddic poems and Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* had been made available by Rasmus Rask (1818 [both works]) and Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission (Poetic Edda: *Edda* 1787–1828; Snorri's *Edda*: 1848–87). There were also comparatively recent translations of the Poetic Edda into several European lan-

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guages, including English, German, Danish, Swedish and French. For *Snorra Edda*, there were new translations into English and German, Danish and Swedish. Von der Hagen's 1807 edition of the text of the *Nibelungenlied* was also to hand, as were his new German translations of *Völsunga saga* (1814) and *Þiðreks saga af Bern* (1815). Equally valuable were Jacob Grimm's new *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835) and Niels Matthias Petersen's *Nordisk Mythologi* (1849). Moreover, archaeology was developing fast as a field, with new information for set and costume designers increasingly becoming available in works like Franz Josef Mone's *Geschichte des Heidenthums im nördichen Europe* (1822–23). As with the preceding period, the works to be considered in the following chapter all provide a good sense not only of how dramatic authors (and their directors) *visualized* Old Nordic religion and mythology at different times (on the basis of the material available to them), but also how their audiences came to experience this material in theatres, and how they were encouraged to envisage connections and relevance to the world they knew outside.

In terms of the dramatic medium itself, the internationally well-known mythological and early historical works of authors like Ewald, Klopstock, Fouqué and Oehlenschläger (see Chapter 6.1 in Volume 1) had provided models (albeit somewhat daunting if not potentially antiquated ones in the eyes of many young Nordic authors). Alongside these, there was a growing feeling among some scholars that the dialogues of the eddic poems might themselves be remnants of ancient Nordic drama, something that was indirectly implied by the ways in which the poems (especially *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Harbárðsljóð*, *Skírnismál*, *Lokasenna*, *Fáfnismál* and *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*) tended to be printed in recent editions, with the names of speakers commonly appearing above speeches (as in dramas) rather than in the margins (as in the original manuscripts) (see Gunnell 1995: 1–6). The idea that the remnants of such dramatic ancient rituals might still be found in later Nordic and Germanic folk customs secured further support from Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831–80) in his *Wald- und Feldkulte* (1875–77), which followed the Grimm brothers' example in terms of searching for pagan origins in later folklore.

While most Nordic playwrights of the latter part of the nineteenth century could not help being initially influenced by Oehlenschläger,[2] many seem to have found this influence increasingly stifling and old-fashioned, especially as naturalism and modern social drama began to take root as part of the so-

[2] Among the latest examples of Nordic theatrical works directly based on eddic poetry and mythology during this period (in the Oehlenschläger style) are the ballets *Valkyrien* (1861) and *Thrymskviden* (1868), both choreographed by August Bournonville (1805–79) for the Det

called *moderne gjennombrudd* ('modern breakthrough') advocated by critics like Georg Brandes (1842–1927), most particularly in the period after 1870. Two of the first plays written for the stage by Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), *Kæmpehøjen* ('The Warrior's Grave Mound', 1850) (Ibsen 1902: 1–44; trans. in Ibsen 1921: 95–126) and *Hærmændene på Helgeland* ('Warriors at Helgeland', 1858) (Ibsen 1962a: 147–82; trans. in Ibsen, 1962b)[3] mark the start of a deliberate move out of Oehlenschläger's shadow (not least on the part of Ibsen). The former work, first performed in Oslo in 1850, is set in Viking Age Sicily rather than the Nordic countries themselves, and the ruined classical temple and more recent pagan grave mound that form part of the set, rather than playing an active role, are essentially meant to represent two different now archaic cultures that are coming to an end in the face of a new world order in which Alfader (here apparently the Christian god rather than Óðinn), Balder and *den milde Freja* ('the calm Freja'), representing love, will rule together (Ibsen 1902: 6).[4]

Ibsen's *Hærmændene på Helgeland*, written just eight years later, limits its references to pagan religion and mythology to the use of the now archetypal *valkyrja* image (regularly found in the classical viking dramas of earlier times) adopted for the figure of Hjørdis (Ibsen 1962a: 175 and 180); the deliberate use of the names Sigurd and Gunnar for its two male heroes; the mention of men taking part in a mountain *seid* (Old Norse *seiðr*, a magical rite used to prophesy the future or bring about harm to others) dressed as women (Ibsen 1962a: 164); a final scene by a grave mound; and the recurring talk of the ride of the dead (Ibsen 1962a: 161, 181–82). This latter image, apparently observed by those on stage (and heard by the audience) after the deaths of Hjørdis and Sigurd, is nonetheless based more on the kind of living folklore that Ibsen had himself collected in Norway than on mythology. Ibsen was clearly becoming more interested in character and psychology than in National Romantic stereotypes. In the future, while indirect reference would be made to mythic characters like Brynhildr through figures like Hedda Gabler, Ibsen's later work was to have no further recourse to Old Nordic religion or mythology.

Kongelige Teater in Copenhagen, with music by J. P. E. Hartmann (1805–1900: op. 62 and op. 67). Bournonville had earlier choreographed another work related to Old Nordic religion, *Herthas Offer: Divertissement* (1838), which had been arranged by J. F. Frøhlich: see <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/mus/BOURNON2/> [accessed 16 July 2018].

[3] On these two dramas, see further Aarseth (1994: 4–6), Hemmer (1994: 14–17), McFarlane (1989: 115–18 and 142–53).

[4] Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this chapter are those of the authors.

The same development can be seen in the early work of August Strindberg (1849–1912), such as *Den Fredlöse: Sorgespel* ('The Outlaw: A Tragedy') from 1871,[5] which had roots in an earlier planned drama called *Blotsven* ('Sven the Sacrificer'). Once again, even though the play starts in archetypal form by focusing on the conflict between Christianity (represented by Gunlöd and her Crusader lover, Gunnar) and the pagan world (represented by Gunlöd's parents), the pagan elements, as in Ibsen's *Kæmpehøjen*, are largely limited to the hall setting in which the central high seat pillars are clearly decorated with images of Odin and Tor (Strindberg 1991: 99).

Oehlenschläger's influence is stronger in the three scenes of an abandoned libretto that the Norwegian playwright Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) wrote for Edvard Grieg's planned opera *Olav Trygvason* (Grieg Op. 50) in *c*. 1872 (two years before Wagner completed *Der Ring des Nibelungen*), before Bjørnson, too, moved on to more contemporary subjects.[6] Set in an undescribed Norwegian pagan temple, the weighty and well-researched scenes all centre around ritual activities, the first depicting an *offergode* ('sacrificial priest') and his congregation calling on the various gods for advice as to how to deal with the southern threat posed by King Olav Trygvason. This is followed by a second scene which involves a *vølve* ('prophetess') carrying out a form of *seiðr* ritual using runes carved at *Odins horg* ('Odin's altar') to communicate with the gods about the threat. The final scene depicts various pagan celebrations, as the people make blood sacrifices, and pray to the *Asynjer* ('goddesses'), and protecting *Diser*, *Alfer og Vætter* ('Female Guardian Beings, Elves and Spirits') of all sizes.

In Iceland, the home of the eddic poems and sagas, unlike on the mainland, such historical national drama was nonetheless still in its infancy. Sigurður Guðmundsson *málari* 'the painter' (1833–74) had spent ten years in Copenhagen in 1848–58, and there is little question that the experimental *tableaux vivants* he designed for presentation in Reykjavík including such mytho-

[5] The final version of *Den Fredlöse* can be found in Strindberg (1991: 94–150) (for the earlier version, *Den Fredlöse: Dramatisk Dikt*, see 1991: 43–93). For a translation (as *The Outlaw*), see Strindberg (1969: 1–31).

[6] The text, with a facing translation can be found in <http://www.naxos.com/sharedfiles/PDF/8.573045_sungtext.pdf> [accessed 20 November 2017]. Other Nordic operas from this period with a Viking theme include *Vikingarne* ('The Vikings') (1877) by Frans Hedberg (1828–1908: libretto) and Ivar Hällstrom (1826–1901: music); and *Tirfing* (1898: based on *Hervarar saga*) by Anna Boberg (1864–1935: libretto) and Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871–1927: music), which was performed in Stockholm in 1898. The latter commences with a prologue set in Angantýr's grave mound.

logical themes as Viðarr fighting Fenrir, Sigyn and Loki in the cave, Sigurður and Ragnarr loðbrók fighting serpents and Þórr fighting the Miðgarðsormr (see Lárus Sigurbjörnsson 1954: 30–31; Sveinn Einarsson 1991: 247–50; and Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson 2017: 82–86 and 90) were influenced to some degree by the themes and final grand tableaux of Ewald's and Oehlenschläger's earlier works. In his writings, Sigurður also directly reflects Oehlenschläger in demanding that the Icelandic playwrights of the future should produce work based on local, Icelandic, sources, such as the sagas and eddic poems. While no Icelanders in this period felt drawn to take on Nordic mythology as a theme for their new dramatic works as Ewald and Oehlenschlåger had done,[7] several of Sigurður's disciples nonetheless later went on to write historical dramas based on saga material which, like Ibsen's and Strindberg's early works, contained the occasional reference to Old Nordic belief and ritual. Most relevant in the present context is the historical showpiece *Helgi hinn magri: Dramatiskar sýningar* ('Helgi the Lean: Dramatic Presentations') (1890) by Matthías Jóchumsson (1835–1920) (Matthías Jochumsson 1961: 101–85),[8] the first part of which is set below deck on the ship of the Icelandic settler, Helgi Eyvindarson, where *líkneski nokkur* ('various images') can be seen on a table or platform. This section then includes a scene in which Helgi, casting lots about the future, hears disembodied voices from above (God) and below (Þórr) (Matthías Jochumsson 1961: 110–12).

Predating Bjørnson's and Grieg's planned opera with its live and melodramatic depictions of pagan ritual is *Revenge or Woman's Love*,[9] written by the influential Old Norse philologist and folklorist George Stephens (1813–95) in Copenhagen in 1857, a work which once again takes on the theme of conversion as it strives to underline the difference between the barbarity of the pagan world of Sweden, and the more sophisticated environment of Christian medieval England. The former is emphasized in the scenes of fires, priests, images of gods, bloodstained temple walls, rune-casting, *fornyrðislag* song and potential human sacrifice to 'ODEN our God supreme, the glorious founder | of Northland realms' (Stephens 1857: 34–40), based largely on Adam of Bremen's account of the sacrifices at Gamla Uppsala (see Schmeidler 1917: 259–60; Tschan 1959: 208), and a *seiðr* ritual on a runestone-topped grave mound,

[7] As can be seen in the latter part of this chapter, Icelandic playwrights have, until very recently, been strangely reluctant to write plays about Norse mythology.

[8] On *Helgi inn magri*, see also Sveinn Einarsson (1991: 349–51).

[9] On Stephens and this work, see further Wawn (1995; 2000: 220–36).

involving a disappearing witch, 'perfume-breathing herbs', 'explosions and a thick reek' (Stephens 1857: 63). One also notes the enduring attraction of the image of the Nordic woman Signe dressed in 'the habit of a War-maid' (Stephens 1857: 73).

While Stephens's work drew strongly on Oehlenschläger and Ewald, Wagner's growing international celebrity in the latter half of the century came to be reflected in the work of several English authors who considered creating their own Nordic operas: *Baldur: A Lyrical Drama* (1893) by Howard Orsmond Anderton (1861–1934), appears to have been one such opera that was planned and published but never performed (on this and several other dramas discussed here, see further Chapter 4.2 above).[10] The opera represents a blend of the classical and the increasingly expressionistic approaches of the *fin de siècle* as it moves from 'Baldur's garden' in 'white marble' and gold with 'clustering roses' (Anderton 1893: 5) to 'Loki's Fire-palace' in which there are 'Fire-spirits, clad in flame' (Anderton 1893: 15); a banqueting hall at Valhalla where Baldur, a blend of a god of the sun[11] and Jesus (Anderton 1893: 6, 9 and 27), is killed by Höder; and 'a small hall in Hela's mist-palace' in which the audience can see 'three or four gnomes, half seen in misty twilight, keeping watch' (Anderton 1893: 27–30). The play ends in a darkened Valhalla, with a background vision of an image of Prometheus chained, which fades and turns into a cross, ending with bright light and the 'fullest intensity of glory, the vision of Baldur, in white robe' as a voice announces that 'Ye have your king!' underlining that 'One Law, the Love of God, moves all the world' (Anderton 1893: 40). There seems little question that this work reflected an attempt to blend Christian morality with interests in northern antiquity and criticism of the late-nineteenth-century greed and decadence reflected in works like Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890) and *Salome* (1893).

Just three years later in 1896, England saw the first performance of Edward Elgar's *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*, which returned to the accounts of pagan activities recounted in the sagas (Longfellow, Acworth and Elgar 1896; see further Wawn 1998: 395–97). Accompanied by a libretto by Harry Arbuthnot Acworth, and based on 'The Saga of King Olaf' in 'The Musician's Tale' in Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863–73), the cantata draws on

[10] In the front of the published edition, Anderton states cryptically that 'owing to the particular character of this opera, performance can only be looked for under exceptional conditions.'

[11] On the idea of Baldur as a fertility or sun god in the (especially German) scholarship of this period, see further Lindow (1997: 28–31).

Snorri Sturluson's account of Óláfr Tryggvason's conversion of Þrandheimr in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*. The performance itself involved an effective blend of storytelling and first-person appearances by figures like King Olaf, a pagan chieftain called *Járn-skeggi* ('Ironbeard') and then the invisible god Thor himself who is represented by a whole choir of voices. Like Grieg and Bjørnson's earlier-planned opera noted above, the first part of the work focuses on the conflict between Olaf and the pagan farmers of Drontheim at the 'shrine of Thor', the play ending with 'the Cross of Christ' appearing 'o'er the blood-stained Horg stone' (Longfellow, Acworth and Elgar 1896: 3).

Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf, old-fashioned in theme though it might have been, showed that the British were capable of moulding Nordic themes to fit their own mentality and style of musical presentation. As noted above, however, Anderton's slightly earlier *Baldur* reflected other, more recent international developments that were taking place in the field at the same time. *Baldur* was a more symbolic and ritualistic work which was completely in line with a new theatrical movement that was gaining momentum particularly in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, and would continue until the end of the Second World War, marking out the field of Old Nordic drama as effectively as Oehlenchläger had marked it during the National Romantic period. While still drawing on the models of Ewald and Oehlenschläger (both well known to German audiences) as well as Fouqué (see further see Chapter 5.1 in Volume 1), the movement in question was more closely related to the more recent works and ideas of Wagner and Nietzsche (see further Chapter 4.1 in this volume) concerning the relationship between nation, religion and the theatre.[12] Further fuel was provided by more recent arguments of German scholars such as Gräter, Müllenhoff, Mannhardt and Simrock (see Chapters 2.1, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.5 above). All of these authors had been increasingly arguing for connections having existed between early Nordic-Germanic ritual and the eddic poems, not least with rituals relating to the changing of the seasons, something that was given weight by the various editions of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* which began appearing in 1890. German authors had now largely moved away from the earlier interest in ancient historical heroes reflected in the earlier works of Klopstock and Fouqué.[13] Focus was now placed more on mythology,

[12] See further Williamson (2004: 181–210, 234–99) and Leerssen (2006: 173–218) in particular.

[13] One of the last examples of this kind of drama in this period was Alois Flir's *Regnar Lodbrog, Oder der Untergang des Nordischen Heithenthums: Eine Tragödie* (1865).

twilight and new dawning, and the idea of *ragnarök* and seasonal renewal, and (as in Anderton's work) most particularly on the figures of Loki and Baldur (as a form of heroic, tragic Frazerian sun god), and then (somewhat later) on the figure of Völundr, the mythical heroic artisan who was seen to reflect the triumph of the human will over adversity. There is little question that the dramas in question were often more firmly rooted in the eddic poems than many of those that had preceded them, not least those poems directly relating to *ragnarök*: *Völuspá*, *Baldrs draumar* (sometimes referred to as *Vegtamskviða* in earlier times), *Lokasenna* and (less frequently) *Vafþrúðnismál*.

The earliest of the new German Baldr dramas (appearing just seven years before Anderton's opera noted above) was *Loki: Altgermanisches Trauerspiel* ('Loki: A German Tragedy', 1886), a grand theatrical work by Agnes Kayser-Langerhannss (1818–1902), which in published form reached three editions (see Kayser-Langerhannss 1890). Although its title deliberately emphasizes the *altgermanisch* features of the mythology involved, this work, concentrating on Loki, stands apart from many that followed it because of its wide range of female mythological characters and not least Thök, *das ewige Dunkel* ('the eternal dark'), mother of Loki's child *Der Tod* ('Death') (Kayser-Langerhannss 1890: 36) and Sigyn, who are perhaps meant to represent two different sides of Loki's character.

Once again making use of nature symbolism, the play moves from the dark mountainous *Riesenheim in der unterwelt* ('home of giants in the underworld') (Kayser-Langerhannss 1890: 5) where the giants want revenge for their mistreatment, to the golden Wagnerian *Götterburg* ('the castle of the gods'), where the gods worry about Baldur (here *Friedens- und Frühlingsgott*, 'god of peace and the spring'); to the *wildromantische* rocky landscape around Mimir's well and Ygdrasil, the left of the stage being dominated by the archetypal grave mound of the *Wöla des Traumes* ('Wöla of Dream') (Kayser-Langerhannss 1890: 49), who is called up with runes by Odin (under the name of Vegdam). After Baldur's death at the hands of Hödur (here referred to as *Herbstgott*, 'autumn god': Kayser-Langerhannss 1890: 3) in *Gladheims Hof* ('the hall of Gladheim'); and Hermodr's unsuccessful visit to Hela (Kayser-Langerhannss 1890: 75), the play moves to Aegir's underwater palace, decorated with crystal, coral and shells (Kayser-Langerhannss 1890: 84). The final act of the play takes place on Wigrid's field near the coast, amidst runestones, where a chained Loki is freed and the final battle immediately commences off stage. The *Todtenschiff* ('Ship of Death') then appears, along with *Der Tod*, who embraces his father and sinks into the stage with him (Kayser-Langerhannss 1890: 113–15). The play ends with Gullweig describing *ragnarök* and the deaths of the gods, all of

which are reflected symbolically for the audience. The final words are then spoken by Skuld, who points to the gods, goddesses and Walküren (*valkyrjur*) on the rainbow, as the audience watches the sun return to the sound of Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* ('The Creation': H. 21/2), reminded that the world will rise again.

As the descriptions of the various gods imply, Kayser-Langerhannss's play emphasized ideas of apocalypse, seasonal change, death and resurrection, all of which would be common themes of many of the German dramas that were to appear in the following decades, starting five years later with the German *première* of *Balders Tod: Musikdrama*, with a libretto by Karl Edgar Freiherr von Sohlern (1853–1928) and music by the once-respected Cyrill Kistler (1848–1907) who knew Wagner and was deeply influenced and respected by him (see Kistler 1896; von Sohlern 1896). Using similar settings of a dark, mountainous landscape, where the Wala, brewing mead (von Sohlern 1896: 3), is questioned by Wotan, the Alvater ('All-father') and Wandrer[14] ('the Wanderer'), here named Wegwalt ('Ruler of the Road') (von Sohlern 1896: 2, 4); Aegir's *Krystallsaal* ('crystal hall') which resembles a underground cavern (von Sohlern 1896: 23), where a fiendishly laughing Loke challenges the gods; and Asenheim (Asgard), with Wotan and his ravens and wolves at the centre, and a vision of the rainbow and other wider spaces at the back (von Sohlern 1896: 35), the play ends as *ragnarök* is about to start after the death of Baldur, the setting being transformed to that of the altar in a Roman temple, where *der Heiland* ('the Saviour') appears with one arm raised in blessing, and a choir of voices from above praises *Gott in der Höhe* ('God on high') as twilight falls (von Sohlern 1896: 53). This ending makes it even clearer that for von Sohlern and Kistler, as for many others of the period, direct associations were seen to exist between Baldr and Christ.

These two late nineteenth-century German works on Baldr were followed in 1898 by three others, all of which demonstrate that in performance the Baldr story was increasingly beginning to take on ritualistic and religious overtones in line with Wagner's hopes for a new blend between the theatre and religion: *Das Balderspiel* ('The Baldr Play'), here called *ein Deutscher Weihgesang* ('a German sacred song'), by Karl Fiescher; *Wuotans Ende: Schauspiel* ('Wuotan's End: A Drama') by the German author Friedrich von Hindersin (1858–1936); and the short one-act prose *skizz* ('sketch') *Baldurs Tod* ('Baldr's Death'), by Helene Escales, which keeps largely to the main events of Baldr's death but again has clear Christian overtones. The latter work is preceded by an introduc-

[14] It might be remembered that the name 'Wanderer' is also used in Wagner's *Siegfried*.

tion which stresses that Baldr should also be seen more widely as *Personification von Licht, frühling und allem Guten* ('the personification of light, spring and all good'), underlining that the myth of Baldr and Nanna was closely connected to the solstice and the changing of seasons. In support of this, Escales notes the folkloric connections between mistletoe and Christmas in England, suggesting that the story contains echoes of an earlier *Naturreligion* ('Nature religion') (Escales 1898: 5–6). In this work one can perhaps see the roots of the mythological and ritualistic *völkisch* dramas that were soon to appear in Germany.

Another more experimental forerunner of the forthcoming *völkisch* dramas during this period is *Der Wala Erweckung: Ein skaldisches Weihespiel* ('The Awakening of the Seeress: A Skaldic Religious Drama', 1895), written by the Austrian occultist writer Guido List (1848–1919, usually referred to as Guido von List), a central figure within the Germanic and Runic revivalist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (regarding List, see also Chapter 9.2 below). First performed for the nationalist *Bund der Germanen* ('Germanic League') in 1892, and later in front of over three thousand people in 1895, the play is set in a modern-day Austria where a man called Runwalt ('Rune Ruler') descends to earth foretelling the downfall of the German people.[15] He then summons up a *Wala* from a grave mound in the hope that she can provide information about the forthcoming fate of the German nobility. The *Wala* comments on the lack of unity and division amongst the German people, their attitudes to other countries and the resulting destruction of the race, as well as the Germans' blindness to the catastrophe that faces them. She informs Runwalt that there is no way in which he can hinder the downfall. The *Wala* then reveals that she is actually Germania, a maiden who has been held captive by the dragon of financial greed. She recognizes Runwalt as being at one and the same time Wuotan, St George and Arminius, a united trinity that she feels bound to follow. The play ends with Runwalt ominously uttering a new slogan: *Durch Reinheit zur Einheit* ('Through Purity to Unity').

Potentially *völkisch* elements can also be seen in *Skirnisför oder im Reiche Wotans: Pantomime und Ballet nach der 'Edda'* ('Skírnir's Journey or in the Kingdom of Wotan: Pantomime and Ballet based on the Edda', 1900),[16] by Richard Francke. This multimedia and visually powerful creation which keeps more closely to the original mythological texts than many other works of its

[15] Quoted in von Schnurbein (1994: 92–93). The description of the play that follows is largely a translation of von Schnurbein's summary given in this article.

[16] A summary of the performance is given in German, French and English in Francke (1900: 5–6).

time, indirectly offers support for the idea that some of the eddic poems may have contained the remnants of original fertility dramas which could be recreated in the present. The work begins with a pantomime, which largely follows the events of *Skírnismál* (Freyr and Gerðr here being called Froh and Gerda), and ends with the sign of the coming spring 'which [...] takes place at the nuptials of 'the god of the sun' with 'the goddess of the earth' (Francke 1900: 5). The second part involves a ballet celebrating the aforesaid nuptials 'in the Blossomgrove (in mythological terms, the budding earth)' (Francke 1900: 5), where Froh and Gerda meet Hoar-Frost Giants ('representatives of Winter'), Asen ('goddesses of the upper world'), Alben ('demonic beings who dwell in the depths of the earth'), Walkyries ('battle virgins') and Nornen ('goddesses of fate'), along with various 'gnomes and fire sylphs' (Franke 1900: 4–5). Wotan then blesses the pair before the Asen dance a Mazurka, the giants a waltz and Freia, Gerda's sister, a solo *Fantasie-Gavotte* which ends a 'demonic general dance' which may be assumed to reflect the Dionysian aspects of early religion that Nietzsche had earlier noted (Francke 1900: 5). Of particular interest is the final scene, which, like the first, is set in 'Geirangerfjord' in western Norway, 'a favourite resort of his Majesty, the German Emperor during his excursions' (Francke 1900: 4),[17] decked with spring vegetation, where Froh and Gerda 'drive in their chariot high up in the clouds towards the sun' as singing voices are heard issuing from the rocks (Francke 1900: 4).

Four more German Baldr dramas appeared in rapid succession in 1901–02: *Baldur* (1901), said to be the first part of a larger work called *Die Götterdämmerung* ('The Twilight of the Gods') by A. G. Alten; *Loki* (called 'Modernes Drama', 1901) by the German actor and playwright Karl Weiser (1848–1913); *Baldurs Tod* (1902) by Paul Schmidt; and *Balders Tod* (1902) by Leopold Ripcke. The first of these, with its choral comments on the action seems to be a deliberate attempt to echo the form of Greek drama, and it is constructed around short scenes containing long debates. It also introduces a new tone in its suggestion that Wotan goes to the well of Mimir in the underworld (Act III) mainly to *die Urkraft des Wollens verbinden/ Mit weislichem Sinn* ('bind the underlying power of the Will | with the wisdom of temperament') (Alten 1901: 92), something that again points strongly to underlying Nietzschean influence.

[17] Kaiser Wilhelm II was particularly fond of visiting Western Norway (Wawn 2000: 127–28), See also Chapter 6.2.3 in Volume I. The scene was probably designed to win the Kaiser's support for the play.

A turning point in German drama featuring eddic mythology came two years later in 1903 with the outdoor staging of the first dramatic work by the writer and dramatist Ernst Wachler (1871–1945), in which the lines between theatre and neopagan ritual were deliberately blurred. Wachler, who established the *Wodan-Gesellschaft* ('Wodan-Society') in 1910, was one of leading figures in the movement for the development of so-called *völkisch*[18] *religiöses Weihespiel* ('*völkisch* religious dramas') (see further Chapter 9.2 below). Such works (the roots of which can be seen in some of the earlier dramas noted above) were a direct development of Wachler's dream of creating *Sommerspiele auf vaterländischer Grundlage* ('Summer dramas with a Fatherland-like foundation'), which would serve to create *Läuterung deutscher Dichtkunst im Volksgeiste* ('the purification of German poetry in the spirit of the folk').[19] In order to further this purpose, Wachler created the Harzer Bergtheater in 1903 on the mountain plateau of Hexentanzplatz in Harz, which was believed to have been used for cultic activities in the past (see further von Schnurbein 1994: 99–100; 2004: 85–90). Designed as an outdoor *Naturbühne* ('nature stage'), and modelled on ancient Greek theatres, the theatre seated no less than 1200 people. Wachler, who had been impressed by Wagner and the work of Guido List (see above), believed that theatre performances should offer a religious experience for their audiences, as the Greek theatre had — except that in his theatre, the idea was for the material and the beliefs encountered to be purely Germanic (von Schnurbein 2004: 86–88). To Wachler's mind, the new dramas should also draw on original native mythology and ritual, the Poetic Edda serving as the central *Religionsbuch* ('religious book') for a new performance-based German religion (von Schnurbein 1994: 91; 2004: 90; see also Neufert 2011: 269–70). Obvious echoes can be seen here of Wagner's ideas of *Bühnenweihefestspiel* ('sacred festival dramas'), and how theatre could find renewal in the creation of a new form of music drama that would contain cultic elements and instil a deeper feeling of national unity (Williamson 2004: 195–204; von Schnurbein 1994: 87).

[18] As noted in von Schnurbein (1994: 87), it is difficult to translate words like *völklich* ('national') and *völkisch* ('ethnic'), which refer to particular concepts relevant to the period. While both words are rooted in the idea of the 'folk', they refer to a particular national ideology with racist associations and the concept of *Blut und Boden* ('blood and earth'). On this movement, and its relationship to the ideas of Nietzsche and Wagner, see further Williamson (2004: 285–92), Neufert (2011) and Puschner (1996, 2001).

[19] Translation provided by von Schurbein. The German is quoted in von Schnurbein (1994: 87).

Figure 5.1.1: Wachler: *Mittsummer*. Original Harz theatre production (1905).
Courtesy of Stadtarchiv Thale: Fotoarchiv Bergtheater, no. 142. Photograph: Hermann Leiste.

Specially created for the Harz theatre, Ernst Wachler's *Walpurgis* (1903) (von Schnurbein 2004: 90–91, 95–96) *ein Festspiel zur Frühlingsfeier* ('a spring festival drama'), takes the form of a symbolic wedding drama centring on the return of the 'old' gods, Frau Holda, the forest woman, and Allvater Wotan (who once again goes under the Wagnerian name of 'Wanderer'), as well as other folkloric figures like the *Maigraf* ('Lord of May') and *Die Fremde* ('the Stranger'). While Wachler's next work, *Widukind* (1904) (cf. von Schnurbein 2004: 91), deals directly with Charlemagne's conversion of Germany, more directly relevant in the present context are his *Mittsommer: Trauerspiel mit Chören für die Bühne unter freiem himmel* ('Midsummer: Tragedy with Chorus for the Open-Air Stage', 1905)[20] and *Mittwinter: Ein Festspiel zur Sonnenwende* ('Midwinter: A Festival Performance for the Solstice', 1910), in which the connections Wachler saw between mythology, ritual and seasonal change are obvious. All of these works were again composed for the Harz theatre. The former

[20] See also von Schnurbein (1994: 95–98). On the popularity of the Baldr myth for this generation of dramatists in Germany, see also Neufert (2011: 276–81).

begins with a scene containing deliberate echoes of *Skírnismál* in which Balder (blond-haired, dressed in golden armour and a winged helmet)[21] observes Nanna (otherwise dressed in white with a golden head band and belt, and carrying flowers) bathing naked accompanied by three *Waldfrauen* ('forest women') dressed in dark grey, something that she tells him will lead to his death (see Fig. 5.1.1). A jealous Höder, a dark-haired, one-eyed hunter (dressed in dark clothes, and also with a winged helmet) (Wachler 1905: 16) then appears in the forest, and conflict is unavoidable, Höder being unconcerned about whether his actions will lead to the disappearance of the sun and the darkening of the world. The play ends with choral song about midsummer and the changing of the seasons.

Mittwinter, written five years later and set at the winter solstice, is a shorter, more symbolic work, involving just two characters, Höder and Wali (Váli), along with a choir of *kinder des lichts* ('children of the light'). The drama commences with the image of the ugly, giant-like, one-eyed Höder lying amidst semi-darkness and fiery smoke, bemoaning his fate in the dark wintry world that followed his killing of Balder (Wachler 1910a: 5). Wali, apparently born at the winter solstice, then arrives with a bow and arrows, looking for revenge for his brother (Wachler 1910a: 12). After Höder's subsequent death, a choir of children sings praise to the victor, and the sun rises as Wali goes to *dem heiligen Stein* ('the holy stone'), a kind of altar within the theatre, where he reignites the fire that has lain dead.

Similar themes of fire, light and renewal appear in the ritual dramas of the Prussian artist, author and playwright Ludwig Fahrenkrog (1867–1952), another author closely associated with Wachler's theatre movement, who at one point had dreams of constructing his own pagan temple.[22] Both men were central members in the *Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft* ('Germanic Religious Community') (earlier *Deutschreligions Gemeinschaft*), which put on several of Fahrenkrog's plays at the Harz theatre, including *Baldur* in 1913, and *Wölund* in 1914, the latter playing a central role in the celebrations of a large 'Allthing' organized by several related neopagan religious groups.[23] Fahrenkrog wrote two versions of *Baldur*, the original (1908) being followed by a shorter

[21] Two photographs from this production exist: one, showing Balder and Nanna, is contained in Wachler (1910b: 23); the other, showing just Nanna, is kept at the Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung at the University of Köln.

[22] On Fahrenkrog, his visions and associations with the various religious groups, see further Wolff (2003–04, especially 2003–04: 235 on the temple) and Chapter 9.2 below.

[23] This information was kindly provided by Stefanie von Schnurbein.

version for children published in 1924. Both, like Wachler's *Mittwinter*, were clearly meant to be associated with the winter solstice.[24] Here, however, the idea of Baldr as a fertility god is developed in such a way that the god becomes not only a blend of the Nietzschean *prometheischer Übermensch* ('Promethean superman') and Christ, but also the founder of a new fire religion (see von Schnurbein 1994: 91; 2004: 93).

The original *Baldur* play, which uses mythology comparatively freely[25] and is probably meant to take place in the Bronze Age (Fahrenkrog 1908: 5), is set among the people of the Anden (cf. Æsir) and the Vasken (cf. Vanir). Among the central figures are the Anden ruler Wölund (cf. Óðinn), Wölund's sons Hogni (cf. Höðr) and Baldur, and Wölund's brother, the high priest of the fire-cult, Lodur (cf. Loki). The play takes place in various open spaces, including a holy grove, a stone henge and a *þing* meeting site (Fahrenkrog 1908: 5, 31, 77, 49, 99),[26] and tells how Baldur teaches his people how to make fire, thereby bringing about the end of the old dogmatic religion and instituting a new religion built on understanding and action. This invokes the wrath of Lodur who encourages Hogni to kill his brother with the mistletoe in spite of all Wölund's attempts to prevent this from taking place. The shorter version, written sixteen year later, is largely similar, underlining that the fire has been extinguished owing to carelessness and somehow needs to be rekindled (perhaps with the help of a human sacrifice). The play ends with a long poem by a figure named Mone who compares Baldur to the saviour (something echoed in Fahrenkrog's images accompanying the play which underline the idea of Baldur as a form of sun god) (Fahrenkrog 1908: 104). Fahrenkrog's short *Wir bringen Freude! Wir bringen Licht!* ('We bring Joy! We bring Light!', 1923) has a similar ritualistic approach. Referred to directly as a *Weihnachtsspiel* ('Christmas drama'), it was published as part of the *Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft*'s popular compendium, *Das Deutsche Buch* ('The German Book'), along with the community's ten points of belief (Wolff 2003–04: 229–30, 233–34.).

[24] See von Schnurbein (1994: 93–95; 2004: 91–93). For another Baldr play (in alliterative verse) from the same period (with the usual Wagnerian associations), see *Balders Dood: Dramatisch Gedicht in drie bedrijven* ('The Death of Balder: A Drama in Three Acts', 1909) by the Flemish nationalist poet and playwright, Eugeen Oye (1840–1926). This play, which once again gives Balder Christian associations, received a prize from Antwerp in 1906. The authors are grateful to Kees Samplonius for providing further information about this playwright.

[25] On Fahrenkrog's approach to the Edda, see further Wolff (2003–04: 236).

[26] See further Fahrenkrog's evocative illustrations from the play in Fahrenkrog (1908: 5, 29, 31, 47, 49, 58–59, 76–77, 97, 99, 104; 1924: 17, 42).

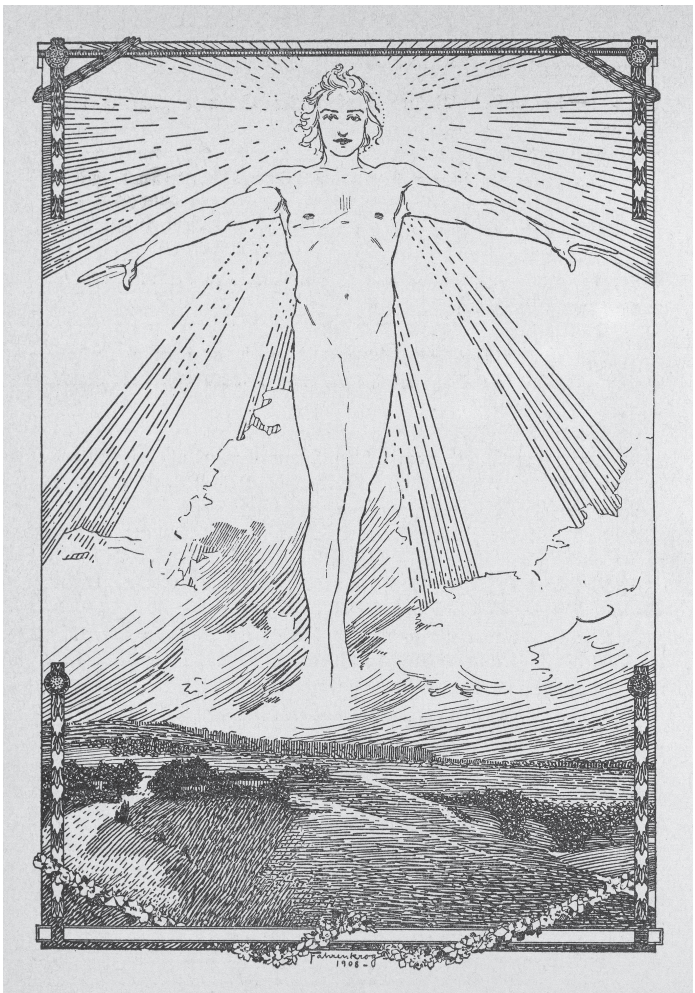

Figure 5.1.2: Ludwig Fahrenkrog: *Baldur* (1908): Drawing of Baldur as a sun god. Courtesy of Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, D.D.oct.2487.

Fahrenkrog's *Wölund* (1914),[27] also meant for outside performance (see above), is less directly related to Nordic mythology outside various mentions of the gods. It is nonetheless a work that was deeply rooted in the spirit of the times and the movement noted above. Very loosely connected with the story of Völundr given in *Völundarkviða* (and even less with that included in *Þiðreks saga*), the play relates the tragic consequences of Wölund saving Nottr, wife of Nidung, from two attackers in a forest, and her subsequent attempt to seduce

[27] See von Schnurbein (1994: 96–98; 2004: 94–96) and Neufert (2011: 281–86) on the popularity of 'Die Wieland saga' during this period.

Figure 5.1.3: Ludwig Fahrenkrog, *Wölund*. Original Harz theatre production (1914). Courtesy of Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft. Photograph: Hermann Leiste.

him.[28] There is little question about Fahrenkrog's understanding of Wölund, who is described as *die Verkörperung eins deutschen, schaffenden und ringenden Mannes von hohem Wollen [...]. Ein Kämpfer und Künstler, ein Waffenschmied mit blauen Augen, freier Stirn und blondem Haupt- und Barthaar* ('the personification of a creative, struggling German with extreme will [...]. He is a fighter and an artist, a weapon-smith with blue eyes, an open forehead, and blond hair and beard') (Fahrenkrog 1914: 4).[29] These ideals are reflected in the song Wölund is heard singing while working at the start of the play: *Heil Arbeit – du machst frei!* ('Hail Work! You free me!') (Fahrenkrog 1914: 18), an expression which was to attain darker overtones in the middle of the century. As in Fahrenkrog's *Baldur*, Nietzschean ideas are clearly reflected in Wölund's statements that he senses he has a god within him and is himself *Im Menschenleibe Gott* ('a god in human flesh'), and that his physical restrictions will always be overcome by his Will which will produce active victory. This latter idea is reflected especially in

[28] Photographs from this production exist in the archive of the Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft see also <https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/fsyBCp8AJQtO0xopsPnLc2?domain=dhm.de> [accessed 16 July 2018].

[29] Translation based on that of Michael Adler.

Wölund's final words, *Sieg und Sonne!* ('Victory and Sun!'), spoken from above, and his statement that: *Es half die Not und weiter der Wille./ [...] Ich **will**!/ [...]/ Jetzt bin ich **Hammer!*** ('Need helped, but more than that, the Will./ [...] I *will* it! [...] Now I am *hammer*!') (Fahrenkrog 1914: 18 and 64–67). Fahrenkrog's Wölund clearly represents a very different kind of hero to Baldur: he stands for the artist and the artisan that will help shape the new Germany. Other figures in the play are equally symbolic, Herwor being large, blonde, ethical and eventually the image of the loyal German mother; Nottr, the dark-haired, passionate and threatening outsider; and Nidung, the brutal, broad and ugly foreign tyrant; while the lower-class servants are described as *einfache Urmenschen, die wie Wolf den Geistesmenschen, instinktiv anerkennen* ('simple primitive humans who instinctively appreciate the man of spirit') (Fahrenkrog 1914: 4).

Whatever political agenda lay behind these *völkisch* works, their semi-ritualistic form should be regarded in the context of the reaction to naturalism that was taking place around them in Europe at the turn of the millennium. This was a period in which lighting and stage design were developing fast at the hands of more abstract stage designers like Adolphe François Appia (1862–1928) and Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), both of whom dreamt of new forms of 'total' theatre experience. Similar experiments in blending art, music and new forms of more abstract symbolic theatre (often based on myth) were taking place in several European countries, in the works of Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949) in France in the 1890s; in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1891); and in the mythical Irish dramas of the early William Butler Yeats (1865–1939). All over the European world, people were seeking to recreate the theatre form in one way or another and escape the 'sitting room' format that had begun to dominate the stage, albeit without returning to National Romanticism. The same was happening in ballet with controversial works like Stravinsky and Nijinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, first performed in Paris in 1913.[30]

Fahrenkrog's *Wölund* was not the first German dramatic work to take on the increasingly attractive figure of Völundr,[31] nor the first drama to be seen at the Harz theatre which dealt with this figure. Between 1905 and 1909, no less than three other German dramas dealing with Völundr had appeared, all of them in some way under the influence of Wagner: *Wieland der Schmied: Dramatische*

[30] For a review of the theatre of this period, see Styan (1981: 11).

[31] Wagner had himself planned an opera *Wieland der Schmied* in 1849–50, seeing the story and central hero as ideal material for the new kind of music drama he envisioned. The draft libretto accompanies his essay *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1850). On Wagner's attitude to the figure of Völundr, see further Neufert (2011: 283–84).

Dichtung (1905), by the author and spokesman for the German folk art movement Friedrich Lienhard (1865–1929); *Wielant der Schmied: Ein dramatisches Heldengedicht* (1906) by the playwright Eberhard König (1871–1949); and *Wieland der Schmied: Ein dramatisches Heldengedicht* (1909) by the journalist and playwright Peter Riedl (1853–1925).

König's work developed the symbolic and folkloristic elements of the story, centring in particular on a ring of power emanating from a particular stone with supernatural powers, including that of deciding the fates of men (König 1906: 5 and 31–33). A similar idea of the *Siegstein* ('stone of victory'), now seen as originally being made from the eye of the dying Baldur, lies at the heart of Reidl's epic *Wieland der Schmied* which was performed first at the Neue Deutsche Theater in Prague in June 1908 (see Riedel 1909: vii–viii and the prologue on v–vi). Like other works of the time, it is a curious mixture of symbolic nature myth, heroic political propaganda, historical chronicle play and theatrical spectacle, reflecting Reidl's statement in the preface that

> wie alle Volkspoesie, betrachte ich auch die Wielandsage als eine Offenbarung der Volksseele, die in diesem Gedichte die Naturverehrung, den Freiheitsdurst und Kampfesmut der alten Germanen besungen, sowie die Verherrlichung ihrer Götter- und Ahnengestalten zu dicterischen Ausdruck gebracht hat. (Riedl 1909: vi.)
>
> (like all folk poetry, I also consider the legend of Wieland as a revelation of the ethnic soul which, in this poem, is seen in the worship of nature, the thirst for liberty and the fighting courage in praise of which the ancient Germans sang, alongside their poetic glorification of their gods and ancestors.)

As noted above, such depictions of Old Norse myth and ritual as those which were now appearing on German stages, both indoors and outdoors, had been losing popularity in most other parts of Northern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In spite of this, a certain degree of interest in the image of the tragic Nordic hero seems to have lingered on in the work of certain British and Icelandic playwrights in pre-war years (perhaps partly encouraged by the enduring popularity of works like Tegnér's dramatic poem, *Frithjof's Saga*) just as it had in other forms of Victorian (and Edwardian) English literature (Wawn 2000). Most of the dramas in question, however, must be seen as comparatively old-fashioned in the light of the new naturalist, expressionist and symbolist dramas that were going on around them, and few place much emphasis on ritual or mythological themes.[32] Worthy of brief mention in

[32] Several other works of a similar kind appeared in other countries during this period, including *Helgi und Sigrun* (1912) by the German author Ferdinand Knorr, and *Halfdan Skald*

the present context, however, are *Frithiof the Bold: A Drama Based upon the Ancient Scandinavian Legend* written by Fredrick I. Winbolt in 1902, which includes scenes that demanded an external and internal manifestation on stage of 'Balder's temple', where audiences would have witnessed an evening sacrifice to the image of Balder (Winbolt 1902: 44–51; and 64–98);[33] *Gísli Súrsson: A Tragedy* (1900) by Beatrice Barmby (1868?–99); *Kiartan the Icelander* (1902) by the English poet and dramatist Newman Howard (1861–1929); and the one-act play *The Riding to Lithend* (1910) by Gordon Bottomley (1874–1948).

Of most interest in terms of its treatment of the theme of myth is Howard's blank-verse drama, based on *Laxdæla saga*, one of a trilogy of dramatic works dealing with conversion themes,[34] which has at its heart an interesting scene largely drawn from Snorri Sturluson's description of the confrontation between the pagan Guðbrandr í Dölum ('Guðbrandr in the Dales') and St Óláfr Haraldsson in *Óláfs saga helga* (in *Heimskringla*, chs 112–13) (Howard 1902: 24–51, and especially 32–39), here used as source material for the arrival of two missionary monks at the Temple of Thor at Holyfell (probably Helgafell) in Iceland, where the audience can see 'two great images of Thor and Odin' (Howard 1902: 24). The scene ends with the powerful image of the monk Gizur smashing the idol of Thor as people shout 'Hail to the Christ! Down, down with Frey and Odin!' (Howard 1902: 48–50). As usual, pagan believers display their unquestioning pagan faith by regularly calling on Thor and his hammer, by drawing comparisons between women and Freya and by associating fate with the cauldron work of the Norns (Howard 1902: 2, 4, 10, 54, 80–81, 86–87 and 89).

Of the same form (and equally dated considering the period) are two other saga dramas composed by Icelanders, *Ingimundur gamli* ('Ingimund the Old') by Halldór Briem (1852–1929) (published in 1901, first performed in Stykkishólmur in 1903; see further Wawn 2007: 414–19); and *Løgneren* ('The Liar') (1917), written in Danish in Denmark by Jóhann Sigurjónsson (1880–1919) and first performed in Copenhagen in 1918 (see further Sveinn

(1914) by the Finnish playwright Alexander Slotte (1861–1927). Such historical and heroic works are nonetheless limited in number.

[33] See also Wawn (2000: 129). Whether any of these dramas was actually performed is uncertain.

[34] *Kiartan the Icelander* was followed up by *Savanarola: A City's Tragedy* in 1904, and *Constantine the Great* in 1906. On *Kiartan*, see also Gilder (1902).

Einarsson 1996: 289–90; Toldberg 1966: 145–59). Of most interest in the former are the three appearances of the *gyðja* (*dís*?) of Vatnsfjörður (Halldór Briem 1901: 1–2, 37 and 62–63), the second time to the accompaniment of horns, lighting effects and a large company of *ljósálfar* ('light elves') and *landvættir* ('land spirits'); and an attempted sacrifice to Þorgerður Hölgabrúður by two magicians, involving a red *blótklæði* '*blót* cloth', a knife, a *blótbolli* '*blót* cup' and a sacrificial wand (Halldór Briem 1901: 545–45). For the present discussion, the main value of Jóhann's play, which like Bottomley's drama is based on the events of *Njáls saga*, is its prologue (Jóhann Sigurjónsson 1917: 7–17), set around a pagan altar in a deep, wide gorge (Jóhann Sigurjónsson 1917: 7) in which Valgard, father of Maar (Mörðr Valgarðsson), offers up a Christian cross on the altar, calling on Odin and Thor to punish Christian blasphemers, and raising his arms to the night (Jóhann Sigurjónsson 1917: 7–8), thereby providing the story with a new fatal framework.

An intriguing exception to the earlier-noted pattern of pre-war British drama on Nordic themes can nonetheless be seen in *The Passing of Baldur: A Winter's Mystery in Two Parts* (1911) by the art historian Hope Rea (b. 1860), which works on a more naïve, symbolic level, somewhat like those experiments with the medium being made during the same period by authors like Wachler, Fahrenkrog, Yeats and Maeterlinck. Describing her work as a seasonal 'folk play' (offering direct parallels to the German works from this period noted above), Rea underlines in her introduction that she sees Baldur as 'the sun god', whose death also deprives the gods of life (Rea 1910: [*Odin*][35] 3).

The first part of the play, entitled *Odin the Watcher*, keeps comparatively closely to the story of the death of Baldur, even though the initial setting in 'Frigga's house' appears to be based on that of a small cottage, perhaps in Cumberland, where the second part of the play, *The Forlorn Gods*, is also set (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 8). Outside the cottage, to the left of the stage, Odin sits on 'a raised seat half hidden in ash branches' (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 7), in his role as 'World's Watcher' and 'World's Wanderer' (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 13–14). The play has a number of symbolic elements ranging from the colours of the clothes worn by the characters (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 4) to the use of off-stage bass and alto voices for the various natural forces that swear not to hurt Baldur (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 4 and 10); the idea that Frey is 'the Spring-god' (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 4); and the suggestion that Baldur is killed by Hoder while standing in front of a

[35] Note: in this edition each play has its own page numbering: *Odin*: 1–31 and *The Forlorn Gods*: 1–24.

holly bush outside the cottage in 'Peace-stead' (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 14–20). The play nonetheless ends with the hope that 'after Winter cometh Spring' (Rea 1910: [*Odin*] 30–31).

The second part of Rea's work is more original. It describes the temporary return of Baldur and Nanna a 'thousand years' after their deaths, to observe a 'modern' Christmas in the Cumberland countryside, where carols are sung; where fir, mistletoe and holly still play a central role; and where the names of local characters reflect faint folk memories of the old gods (Rea 1910: [*The Forlorn Gods*] 5–7). Baldur tells his hosts that he, a 'passing dream' and near forgotten representative of the 'old world', has returned at the decision of 'the Great Will that's outside the World' (Rea 1910: [*The Forlorn Gods*] 15 and 18–20) to bring back the sun, and then ultimately leave the world in the hands of the King who is 'the Light o' the World', represented by the 'Adeste Fidelis' [*sic*] heard on 'muted strings, as though coming from a distance' (Rea 1910: [*The Forlorn Gods*] 20–24). In a sense, it might be said that the play concludes with the intersection not only of pagan Nordic beliefs, sun worship and Christianity, but also Asian philosophy reflected in Rea's ideas (expressed most clearly in the introduction) of 'the changeless Law of Renewal' (Rea 1910: [*Odin*], 4).

The Passing of Baldur, if it was ever performed, seems to have been the last manifestation of the Nordic apocalypse in English drama for over fifty years. The popularity of the Baldr myth as a theme for drama (and not least for a form of semi-ritualistic if not terribly good folk drama) nonetheless seems to have continued unabated in Germany until the end of the Second World War, fuelled in part by three new academic studies which suggested that some eddic poetry might have contained the remnants of early Nordic (if not also Germanic) ritual drama, thereby offering a doorway into not only the ideas but also the experiences of pagan peoples. The works in question were the ground-breaking and often underrated *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* (1920) by Bertha Phillpotts (1877–1932) (Gunnell 1999); 'Essay on Ritual Drama' by Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948) (Grønbech 1932: II, 260–341), which was added to the English translation of his *Vor folkeæt i oldtiden* (1909–12), translated as *The Culture of the Teutons* (1932); and *Kultspiele der Germanen als Ursprung des mittelalterlichen Dramas* ('The Cultic Dramas of the Germans as the Origin of Medieval Drama') (1936) by Robert Stumpfl (1904–37).[36]

[36] For similar ideas in Germany, see Höfler (1952). For a review of scholarly attitudes to these theories, and a list of other early twentieth-century works that suggest that the some of the eddic poems might have had roots in early ritual drama, see Gunnell (1995: 2–9).

The slew of wartime and interwar German Baldr dramas, which vary greatly in quality and sometimes only exist in manuscript form, include *Baldurs Tod: Ein deutsches Schöpfungsmärchen* ('Baldur's Death: A German Creation Fairy Tale', 1915) by Otto Steinbach; *Baldurs Tod: Ein Maifestspiel* ('Baldur's Death: A May Festive Drama, 1919) by the poet and philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz (1881–1969); *Baldur* (1923) by Wally Kallweit; *Baldr: Ein Trauerspiel aus Mythus und Gegenwart* ('Baldr: A Tragedy of Myth and the Present', 1927) by Otto Overhof; *Baldur* (1930) by Minnie Ungerer-Wendt, with music by Lotte Arlt-Kruse (1900–30); *Baldur: Ein Tanzspiel in der Sonnwendnacht* ('Baldur: A Dance Drama for Solstice Night', 1934), with a libretto by Josef Bauer, music by Alfred Dickopf and choreography by Heini Jeanjour; *Baldur und Loki* (1935) by the writer Hermann Gerstner (1903–35); *Baldurs Tod: Tragödie* ('Baldur's Death: A Tragedy', written in 1940 and published in 1943) by the playwright Erich von Hartz; and *Draupnirs Ring (Baldurs Tod): Großgermanisches Schauspiel* ('Draupnir's Ring (Baldur's Death): A Drama of Greater Germany', 1942) by Ewald Lotzing. Into the same grouping, one can add the 'Choreographic Drama in Two Acts', *Baldr* (1943–47), by the Icelandic composer Jón Leifs (1899–1968),[37] which was begun while the composer was living in Germany. As noted above, few of these works have much dramatic quality. The following discussion will thus be largely limited to examining certain distinguishing features and innovatory approaches that appear in them.

The first two works noted above are understandably influenced by the events of the First World War. Steinbach's short but action-packed *Baldurs Tod* places Baldur's death in the context of conflict between the Germanic tribes and the Roman legions in the Iron Age: Baldur (adopting the role of Armin: Steinbach 1915: 5 and 22), with flowing blonde hair and carrying a large sun shield before him (Steinbach 1915: 19), eventually dies as a result of a conspiracy by Loki assisted by various *Gnomen* ('gnomes'), *Zwerge* ('dwarves'), *Kolboten* ('kobolts') and *Nebelgeister* ('fog spirits') (Steinbach 1915: 7 and 37). Loki's final triumphant words, followed by the sound of thunder, are ominous: *Der Gottmensch starb* [...]. *Ich bin der Weltgeist! Mer gehört die Erde* ('The god-man god is dead [...] I am the spirit of the world. The world belongs to me!'). The suggestion that Baldur dies at midsummer implies influence from the *völkisch* dramas, something also clearly apparent in Pannwitz's symbolic verse-drama *Baldurs Tod: Ein Maifestspiel* which (as the subtitle suggests) is in much the same spirit as the work of Wachler, Fahrenkrog, Steinbach and Maeterlinck, also reflecting

[37] See Jón Leifs, *Baldr*, op. 34 (Iceland Symphony Orchestra: BIS records, 2002): BIS CD 1230/1231. On Jón Leifs's music, see Chapter 4.3 in this volume.

Nietzsche's ideas of eternal recurrence. The third act, the heart of the play, centres on a May festival itself (Pannwitz 1919: 79–84) in which 'Nanna' becomes the May bride, and the various gods appear in symbolic costumes along with their various animals and representatives of different classes of people (Pannwitz 1919: 113). Following on from Baldur's death and Hermodhr's unsuccessful visit to Hel, the play ends with Baldur and Heimdall viewing images of the new world to come (Pannwitz 1919: 167–71).

Ungerer-Wendt and Arlt-Kruse's *Baldur*, a form of oratorium involving the fashionable *Sprechgesang* form (also used by Wagner), as well as speech choirs including young men, women and children, takes yet another approach once again closely associated with nature mythology (Ungerer-Wendt and Arlt-Kruse 1930a: 2–3). With further *völkisch* undertones, and broken into three parts, the play keeps largely to the accepted plot, although here Loki is essentially angry with Frigga for choosing Wotan instead of him, and Baldur, who has brought light to the world like Prometheus, is aware of the need for his sacrifice. Sets range from Loki's cave set in a forested region to an open space near Valhalla castle. The play ends with the return of the ever-popular *Nornen* who describe how the society of the gods will now be burnt to cinders (Ungerer-Wendt and Arlt-Kruse 1930a: 15–20).

Written five years later, in 1935, Gerstner's *Baldur und Loki* has much stronger political overtones. There are clear hints that it was designed to win the approval of the Nazi party: the work is dedicated to Gerstner's friend Rudolf Kummer (1896–1987), who was closely associated with the National Socialist party and National Socialist cultural policy from the time of the Munich *Putsch* (cf. Gerstner 1935: dedication). While it largely keeps to the original story over the course of ten scenes, the play has several new features, many of which relate to the need for order over chaos at whatever cost. Here Loki, taking the shape of Wodan's hunch-backed half-brother, has clear overtones of Milton's Satan, bitter at the way he and his wife and monstrous chaotic offspring have been mistreated (Gerstner 1935: 12). After Baldur's death, set in an atrium in 'Walhall', *ragnarök* breaks out to the accompaniment of lightning and thunder effects (described by Sigyn) (Gerstner 1935: 62–69). The final scene of the play takes place at the entrance to the *Reich der Underwelt* ('Kingdom of the Underworld'), Baldur, Nanna and Höder returning after Hel has announced that only the purest will survive (Gerstner 1935: 72–75). There would seem to be suggestions that the play reflects the end of the old order brought about by the First World War, and the dream of a new pure future which will arise from the underworld like a new sun.

Less obvious in message, but reflecting similar ideas of hope for the future is von Hartz's typed and duplicated choral verse drama *Baldurs Tod*, which once

again makes use of colour symbolism along with some innovatory ideas for the use of projection and sound effects. Most interesting in the present context, apart from the recurring idea of Baldur's self-sacrifice and the focus on the figure of Sigyn as an overly-neglected mother figure (see von Hartz 1943: xvii–xviii), is the interesting foreword to the play, in which the author underlines the need to remind audiences of their cultural heritage at a time when Germany is dominating the world, and in which myth is placed in the context of the earlier work of Goethe and Wagner, and ideas about nature mythology and power of the Will (von Hartz 1943: i–xviii).

More obvious and ominous contemporary ideas can be seen in Lotzing's typed, duplicated and strangely titled alliterative-verse drama *Draupnirs Ring: Großgermanisches Schauspiel* which, like von Hartz's play, was written during the war years and makes use of choruses. Here the central addition is the dark figure of Ahasverus or Ahasver, *der ewige Jude* ('the Eternal Jew'; cf. the Wandering Jew) who can never die (Lotzing 1942: 1, 3), and is depicted as having *dunkles Haar, assyrische Bartform. Kaftanähnliche, doch prunkvolle Tracht* ('dark hair, an Assyrian beard form, gorgeous, kaftan-like clothes') (Lotzing 1942: 3). Apparently replacing the *jötnar* in the play, Ahasverus is described by Balder as being *ein Wesen wandert, das kein Wesen ist.* | *Nicht menschengleich, nicht götterleich! [...] Er ist der Ewige aus aller Nacht.* | *Der Hassende, der Heimatlose*,| *Ahasverus! Des Frühlings Feind* ('a wandering being, which is no being. | Neither human, nor godly! | [...] He is the Eternal out of all night. | The hateful one, who lacks a homeland, | Ahasverus! The enemy of Spring') (Lotzing 1942: 4).[38] Elsewhere, Ahasverus describes himself as serving *den Verdammten* ('the damned'), and being *der Parasit auf edlen Stämmen* ('the parasite of noble races') (Lotzing 1942: 23–24). He is described elsewhere as being a creator of confusion and *der Feind aller Völker* ('the enemy of all peoples') (Lotzing 1942: 23–24). In the play, Ahasverus is also rumoured to be the father of Loki and later transforms himself into the mistletoe Höd uses to shoot Balder (Lotzing 1942: 10, 21–25). A central and telling feature of Lotzing's ambitious ideas for staging is Balder's ship which arrives to fetch the dead god fronted by the image of the sun-wheel (closely resembling a swastika) and appears against a backdrop of rising fog and twilight (Lotzing 1942: 35).[39] The play ends with the light fading to focus on the sun symbol of the ship, the choir singing that as long as traitors like Loki survive, heroes like Balder must

[38] All translations from this play are based on suggested translations by Michael Adler.

[39] For an image of how Lotzing envisaged the sun-sign, see the front cover of the play.

die. The final conclusion is that *Denn der Verräter ist noch schlimmer als der Feind*! ('he who is a traitor is worse than the enemy') (Lotzing 1942: 48).

Somewhat more original German dramas from the interwar years which draw directly on Nordic mythology are *Der entfesselte Wotan: Eine Komödie* ('Wotan Unchained: A Comedy', 1923) (Davis 1996: 297–310), a lesser-known play written by the famous expressionist left-wing playwright Ernst Toller (1893–1939) in 1919 (see Toller 1924: 4); and *Die letzte Wala: Eine Wotans-Legende: Weihespiel* ('The Last Wala: A Legend of Wotan: A Sacred Drama', 1935) by Gertrud Prellwitz (1869–1942). The former work later came to be performed in Moscow, Prague and Berlin in 1924–26 (see Davis 1996: 298, 300). It commences with a short prologue (a *Wotanisches Impromptu*; see Toller 1924: 7–8) set in Walhall in which *Gott Wotan* ('Wotan the God') appears *auf feuerschnaubenden Rappen* [...] *schwingt ein Lasso* ('on a fire-breathing horse [...], swinging a lasso'), roping 'Wilhelm Dietrich Wotan' (whose names are obviously no coincidence). The god's captive is bare-chested, wears a *Wildkatzenfell* ('wild-cat skin') and *einem Bardenhelm, geziert von mächtigen Hörnern* ('a poet's helmet, topped with powerful horns'), and bears a *mordstrumm* ('monstrous') sword and horn (Toller 1924: 7), emphasizing that he is meant to be a parody of the *völkisch* theatre of the 1920s. The god encourages Wilhelm Dietrich Wotan to take up the old ways, pointing out to the audience that what was once a tragedy is now little more than a joke, but that they should avoid laughing too quickly.

Set in three main acts, 'Allegretto', 'Andante' and 'Scherzo furioso: Rondo finale', the highly prophetic play follows the barber Wilhelm as he and his wife Mariechen are drawn to flee the chaos and poverty of modern Germany to the primal forests of Brazil, where, accompanied by Herr Schleim ('Mucus'), Herr von Wolfblitz, the banker Karauschen, General a. D. von Stahlfaust and the alluring Gräfin Gallig, Wotan is offered a throne by local natives (Toller 1924: 26–27). Sharp satire is made of the persecution of the Jews, greed, financial double-dealing, snobbery and the worship of warfare. The finale commences in a *Pompöses Privatbüro* ('pompous private office') where Wotan has become a little *Führer* in his own right, rejecting his wife for the countess, holding speeches and involving himself in a range of dodgy dealings, all of which are hidden behind the new 'cause'. Eventually, however, the bubble bursts, and as his recent supporters save themselves, Wotan is imprisoned (for his own safety). He plans writing his memoirs (Toller 1924: 60–61).[40]

[40] It might be noted that the play was written two years before the first edition of *Mein*

Prellwitz's *Die letzte Wala*, referred to directly as a *Weihespiel* ('a sacred/ritual drama'), is more traditional and obviously needs to be seen in the context of the *völkisch* works that Toller was questioning. Indeed, it seems to be one of the last examples of this semi-ritualistic genre, but also sees a return to the earlier historical works of Klopstock, Wachler's *Widukind* and Reidl's *Wieland der Schmied* (noted above).[41] It has additional interest because, like Kayser-Langerhannss's *Loki* (1886), it focuses more on the role of female characters than males. Drawing on the account of Veleda given in Tacitus's *Histories* (Book IV), this imaginative play is set at Wotan's sanctuary of Irminsul in the Teutoburg Woods, near the site of the Harz theatre, in AD 772 and AD 785, at the time of Charlemagne's conversion of Saxony which ended with the baptism of Widukind. It focuses on the figure of Brünhild, daughter of the high priest and priestess of the Saxons (Prellwitz 1935: 5–8), who has been chosen to be the new *Wala* of Wotan, here seen as the *Urlicht* ('original light'), *Allheit* ('completeness'), *Ur-sonnen* ('ancient sun') and *der Germanen Gott* ('god of the Germanic peoples') (Prellwitz 1935: 8–14), and bears the responsibility of blessing and protecting the earth from the approaching Franks. The play begins at midnight on the solstice above the sanctuary of Wotan, where the audience can hear the voices of the awakening nature spirits, and *Wotanseiche* ('Wotan's oak'), the first act ending with sunrise and the disembodied voice of the god announcing that a new order is coming (Prellwitz 1935: 28–29). The heart of the play deals with the conflict between Brünhild and Christianity in the shape of *Karl der Franke* ('Karl the Frank'), who means to destroy the holy site. The first part climaxes in a powerful scene at the sanctuary in which Wotan, *der Wanderer*, states that Brünhild's destiny is to live beneath the tree with the spirits for thirteen years as the spirit of *Menschheit* ('humanity'), inflamed with the *heiligen Willen* ('holy Will') (Prellwitz 1935: 78–85), her role now being to listen to the *Sinnen und Sorgen* ('brooding and worries') of the people. The play ends with the Wala's return thirteen years later and her attempt before her death to convince Widukind, pagan ruler of the Saxons, of the evil of money, and personal interests (*Ich-zeit*), and the need to realize that there is a higher plane (*All-zeit*) and a new united universal religion in which Wotan and Jehovah are one (Prellwitz 1935: 94–101). In many ways, Prellwitz's play might be said to contain a crystalized summation of all of the German theatrical approaches

Kampf was published, and several months before the Munich *putsch*. On the links Toller saw between Wotan and the rise of Hitler, see Benson (1984: 71).

[41] On Prellwitz as a dramatist, see further Colvin (2003: 67–71).

to Old Nordic mythology in the first half of the twentieth century, in that it blends the historical, the *völkisch* and the ideas of a blend between pagan sun-cult and Christianity.

After the Second World War, for logical reasons, the discussion of the relationship between the eddic poems and early dramatic presentation came to be viewed as somewhat unfashionable, if not distasteful.[42] The same seems to have applied to the creation of dramas involving Old Norse myth and ritual, not least because it was now difficult to avoid parallels being drawn with Wagner and the forces of Germanic nationalism. In the 1970s, however, encouraged in part by the new (acceptable) interest in fantasy literature (see further Chapter 6.2 in this volume), Nordic playwrights in particular began tentatively returning to Nordic mythology (rather than the sagas) as material for new dramatic works, most of which seem to be either designed for children (the idea being that it is natural to introduce children to the mythical storylines that are already in existence in their culture: see further Chapters 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 in this volume on children's literature), or as a means of indirectly commenting on the present social or political situation by means of myth (as Greek authors like Aristophanes had done).

A forerunner in this field was *Lòke* (published and premiered in Oslo in 1972) by the Norwegian playwright Peter Cappelen (1931–92), in which the sympathy of the audience is once again directed towards the embittered Lòke, whose character seems to be a deliberate parallel to that of Edmund in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (Cappelen 1972: 37). Here said to be the bastard son of Gullveig who was earlier burnt to death by the Aser (Cappelen 1972: 9), this Lòke has been regularly side-lined and ill-treated as a half-cast by both the gods and *jotner* (Icelandic *jötnir*). The gods, meanwhile, are shown to be over-confident, cold, brutal, immoral and selfish, the icy world they have instituted (as they plan to complete the ethnic cleansing of the *jotner*) being one with which the audience can have little sympathy (see, for example, Cappelen 1972: 22, 81). There would seem to be faint echoes here of the aforementioned connections that still existed in the public mind between Old Nordic mythology and totalitarianism.

While keeping loosely to the general story of Baldr's death drawn from *Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Snorra Edda*, Cappelen's play also

[42] For a review of scholarly works published after the Second World War that suggest that the some of the eddic poems might have had roots in early ritual drama, see Gunnell (1995: 9–10).

makes use of themes taken from various other eddic poems and other accounts in *Snorra Edda*. The first act concentrates on the story of Balder's girlfriend Gjerd's (Gerðr's) arrival in Gladheim and its immediate consequences (including Tor's treacherous killing of Mókkurkalve), while Act II places the death of Balder within the context of a four-day celebration of Mókkurkalve's death, which includes a *fruktbarhetsdans* ('fertility dance') by Gjevjon (Cappelen 1972: 80). The ending of the play maintains the ritual mode, with Hod sacrificing himself on Våle's sword (a demand from Hel), Lòke being captured and subsequently nailed to three rocks in punishment for his part in Balder's death and the final reappearance of Gjerd, who has now successfully brought about the end of the world of the Aser. As Gjerd notes, when it comes down to it, in the end, the gods' wars have always been against themselves (Cappelen 1972: 101–07).[43]

Of comparatively recent Nordic children's plays based on Nordic mythology, which seem to focus on the figures of Loki, Baldur and Þórr, one can mention *Loki þó* ('Loki, How Dare You!', 1972–3)[44] written by the Icelandic author Böðvar Guðmundsson (1939–) for Leikhús Reykjavíkur ('The Reykjavík City Theatre') (dealing with Loki's trip to the world of the dark elves to get a golden wig for Sif); *Balderspillet* ('The Baldr Play', 1984) (published along with several other short mythological dramas for children[45]) by the Norwegian children's author Frøydis Alvær Barth (1945–); and *Hvar er hamarinn?* ('Where Is the Hammer?', 1987) by the Icelandic author Njörður P. Njarðvík (1936–) written for Þjóðleikhúsið ('The National Theatre') in Reykjavík, and dealing with the events of *Þrymskviða*. In a similar vein is *Hammer of Thor* (2000), written for tourists by the Icelandic actor and director Gunnar Helgason (1965–) and presented at Hafnarleikhúsið ('Hafnarfjörður Theatre'). Of recent dramatized musical works on Nordic mythology one can mention the Icelandic opera *Þrymskviða* by Jón Ásgeirsson (1928–)[46]; *The Death of Baldur* (1981) by the

[43] Another comparatively modern play dealing with the same subject is Heinrich Maria Lorbür's *Balders Tod: Schauspiel* (1981), probably based on Lorbür's earlier *Balders Tod: Eine Gedankenlyrik aus d. heidnischen Sehnsucht zum christl. Glauben* (1975).

[44] See Aðalheiður Friðþjófsdóttir et al. (1976: 21). We are grateful to Böðvar Guðmundsson for providing us with further information about this performance.

[45] The other plays are *Suttungs mjød* ('Suttung's Mead'), *Tor og Midgardsormen* ('Thor and the World Serpent'), *Tors uheldige ferd til Jotunheimene* ('Thor's Unfortunate Journey to the Land of the *Jötnir*'), *Lokes forvandlingskunster – og Odins åttefotete hest* ('Loki's Shapeshifting — and Odin's Eight-Legged Horse') and *Grottekvernen* ('The Grinding Mill Grotti').

[46] See further Aðalheiður Friðþjófsdóttir et al. (1976: 18–20).

English composer David Bedford (1937–2011); and the choral *Volund* composed by Jan Ekedahl, Mats Hallberg and Eva Sjöstrand for dramatic performance in Visby, Gotland in 1997.[47]

During the same period, several scholars have been reanalysing the possible connection between the eddic poems and early drama, focusing now on the dynamics of oral performance in space that the poems appear to demand as works that lived within the oral tradition rather than attempting to recreate pagan ritual[48] which is seen as a secondary aspect since it is ultimately impossible to recreate the pagan world view or context that accompanied these activities (see Gunnell 1995; 2011; 2013; Sveinn Einarsson 1991: 41–62). Such discussions have been accompanied by a number of successful scholarly experiments with dramatic performances of the poems (especially those poems that were composed in dialogic format, with marginal speaker markings in the original manuscripts).[49]

[47] See Visby Allmänna Sången, Mats Hallberg, and Gunnfjauns Kapell (1998) and <http://www.allmannasangenvisby.se/egna-produktioner/volund/> [accessed 16 July 2018].

[48] In other words, the performance demands that are implicit in the poems. Just as the plays of the Middle Ages tell us a great deal about how these works were performed and the spaces in which they were meant to be performed, many works designed for oral performance contain some implicit information about the ways in which they were performed, not least in terms of sound and rhythm and reference to the performance space. In the case of the eddic poems, the mere fact that several of them take the form of direct speech monologue or dialogue underlines that they would have been expected to work with their audiences in a different fashion to other poems composed as third-person narratives. See further Gunnell (1995: 186–203, 236–80; and 2011).

[49] Such performances include *Lokasenna*, performed by members of the Icelandic department at Hamrahlíð College in Reykjavík, Iceland (1979 and 1986); by students at Durham University (see McKinnell 1987–88: 252); and by the Leiksmiðjan ('Theatre Workshop') group with the Ásatrúarfélag ('Ásatrú Society') in Reykjavík, directed by Rúnar Guðbrandsson (1993); and an experimental outdoor performance of *Skírnismál* (December 1992) by students of Folkloristics at the University of Iceland, in cooperation with the Ásatrúarfélag, directed by Terry Gunnell. This latter performance was followed by further indoor performances of the same work in succeeding years, directed by Ingunn Ásdísardóttir and Margrét Guttormsdóttir. Most recently an experimental performance of *Vafþrúðnismál*, directed by Mathias Nordvig, took place in a reconstructed 'viking' hall at Raunsborg, in Fyn, Denmark, in December 2013. One can also mention the dramatised performances of *Þrymskviða*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Skírnismál* that formed a central part of radio programmes written and directed by Jón Karl Helgason in January 1992: see the Icelandic newspaper *DV*, 9 January 1992, 17; 18 January 1992, 60; and 23 January 1992, 20. On the marginal notation in the manuscripts of the eddic poetry, see further Gunnell (1995: 206–18, 282–329).

Figure 5.1.4:
Jon Fosse, *Edda*, directed by Robert Wilson (March 2017): *Loki*. Courtesy of Det Norske Teatret, Oslo. Photograph: Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

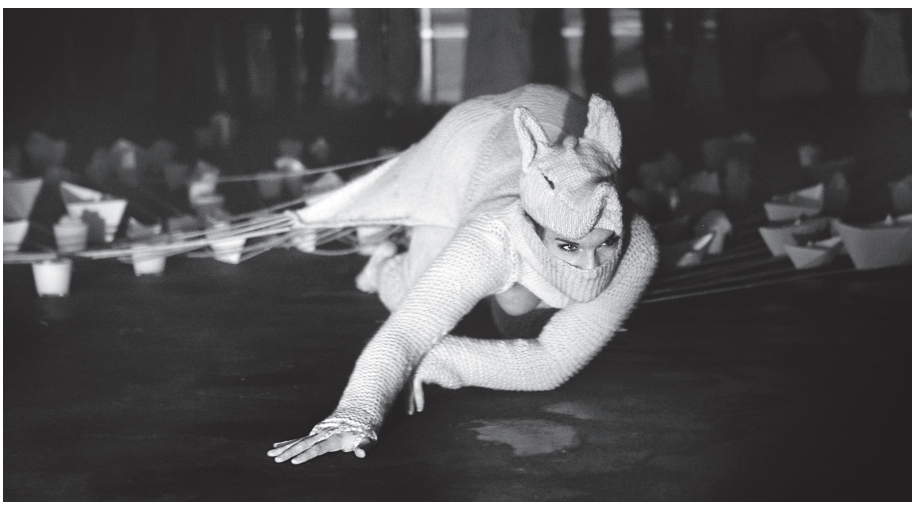

Figure 5.1.5: Republique Theatre of Copenhagen. *Völuspá: A Nordic Food Expedition (Vølvens spådom)* (2011): *Völva*. Courtesy of Republique. Photograph: Per Morten Abrahamsen.

Alongside these have been various other experimental works by artists of various kinds (working with music, ballet and drama), which have deliberately made use of the original texts (or translations of them) as the focus of their work. Of more recent performances, one can mention *Ragnarök*, a dramatic performance given in York Minster, England in 1988, which included sections of several eddic poems, including *Baldrs draumar* and *Völuspá*; Greger Hansen's one-man performance *Recken, runen, riesenweiber* in Galdraloftið ('The Magic Attic'), Reykjavík, in 1991 (which included performances of *Baldrs draumar*, *Völuspá*, *Völuspá in skamma*, *Þrymskviða*, *Skírnismál* and *Lokasenna* in German); the music-theatre projects of Benjamin Bagby and Sequentia, *Edda: Myths from Medieval Iceland* (1995–97), and the *Rheingold Curse* (directed by Ping Chong) (2001–), both of which had *Völuspá* at their heart but also involved the presentation of a range of other eddic poems;[50] the Icelandic actor Peter Eggerz's two-man performances of Þórarin Eldjárn's recent modern Icelandic translation of *Völuspá* (2000–) for Möguleikhúsið ('The Possibility Theatre Company') in Iceland (see Þórarin Eldjárn 1994);[51] Sveinn Einarsson's *Edda.ris* (2000–01) (based on *Skírnismál*) performed by Bandamenn;[52] Pálína Jónsdóttir and Walid Breidi's multimedia one-woman ballet, *Völva* (performed at Þjóðleikhúsið in Reykjavík in 2009), using the same modern Icelandic translation of *Völuspá*;[53] and Sverrir Guðjónsson and Sten Sandel's original song and music work, *Söngur Völvunnar* ('The Song of the *Völva*'), based on the original text of *Völuspá*, which was first performed at Þjóðminjasafn ('The National Museum of Iceland') in Reykjavík as part of an international conference on the poem in May 2008 (see Pétur Pétursson 2013: xv). All of the above underline the enduring power of the eddic poems, not only as texts but also in the form of sound interacting with movement and space, and not least in terms of their ability to inspire new works of art, relevant to current times and current audiences. As can be seen from the above, this applies particularly to *Völuspá*, which became increasingly topical around the turn of the new millennium, amidst increasing threats of global warming, terrorism and political and religious schism.

[50] See Sequentia *Edda* (1995) and *The Rhinegold Curse* (2001). See also <http://www.sequentia.org/programs/program05.html> [accessed 16 July 2018].

[51] See <http://www.mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/734485/> [accessed 16 July 2018].

[52] <See https://www.mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/614539/> [accessed 16 July 2018]

[53] See <http://www.robertwilson.com/edda/> and <https://www.detnorsketeatret.no/framsyningar/edda/> [both sites accessed 16 July 2018). For the original, carefully crafted text on which this production is loosely based, an intricate tapestry composed of modern translations of most of the poems concerning the gods in the Poetic Edda, see Fosse 2017.

Most original of all recent performances are perhaps Robert Wilson's visually and aurally striking production of Jon Fosse's *Edda*, premiered by *Det norske teatret* in Oslo in March 2017 (see Fig. 5.1.4);[54] and *Völuspá: A Nordic Food Expedition* (*Vølvens spådom*), first presented by the Republique Theatre of Copenhagen at The Nordic House, Reykjavík, in cooperation with Restaurant Dill in 2011 (and later performed in both the United States and Denmark in 2012 and 2013) (see Fig. 5.1.5).[55] The former, an inventive and surreal mixture of pre-war German cabaret, Asian puppet-drama and modern ballet, using music by Arvo Pärt and CocoRosie, effectively brought the Nordic myths to a generation brought up on punk rock and David Bowie. The intimate (and expensive) performance of the latter work, using sections of the text of *Völuspá*, both in the original and in translation, took small audiences on a semi-ritualistic journey through a range of innovative sets, each offering new experiences which were designed to play on all the senses (including sound, vision, touch, and even taste and smell), bringing the audience in contact with the ancient heart of the poem while simultaneously referring to the horrors of the present. Starting with the audience having a form of primal, flavoured 'mud' smeared on their lips as they heard about the creation of the world, the performance ended with the image of trapped actors desperately reaching out from the flames of *ragnarök* towards a group of comparatively well-heeled observers that were being offered a final cocktail, most of them unaware that they had become active participants in the artwork.

In a sense, this dramatic performance, more than any other described in this chapter and Chapter 6.1 of Volume 1, brings the dramatic performances of Nordic mythology and religion full circle. While the early seventeenth-century performance of Messenius's *Disa* (see Chapter 6.1 in Volume 1) near the site of Gamla Uppsala began with a scene that was deliberately designed as an image of pagan ritual as the audiences imagined it might have looked, Republique Theatre's production of *Völuspá* used modern means and ancient words to draw audiences into a more internal religious communion with the past.

[54] See <http://www.robertwilson.com/edda/> and <https://www.detnorsketeatret.no/framsyningar/edda/> [both sites accessed 16 July 2018]. For the text on which the performance was based, see Fosse 2017.

[55] See <http://republique.dk/dk/arkiv/volvens-spadom> and <https://vimeo.com/81706434> [accessed 16 July 2018].

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Part 6
The Reception in Literature

6.1 – Literary Modernism and Old Norse Myth

Katja Schulz*
Translated from the German by Beatrice La Farge

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. [...] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. [...] Psychology, [...] ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art.[1]

I.

The quotation above is an answer to a query that could be raised about the present chapter — what is it doing in a volume about the history of religion? On the one hand, this chapter examines the afterlife of the Norse myths (which once had religious content, at least in part) in modern literature; on the other hand, it examines the attempt to use myth in order to establish modernist literature 'as a kind of aesthetic heroism, which in the face of the chaos of the modern world (very much a "fallen" world) sees art as the only dependable reality and as an ordering principle of a quasi-religious kind' (Ástráður Eysteinsson

* I would like to thank my colleague Beatrice La Farge for translating this contribution.

[1] T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', *The Dial*, November 1923 (repr. in Eliot 2001: 128–30; quotation p. 130).

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The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume II: From c. 1830 to the Present, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 267–312
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.115705

1990: 9). This second aspect pertains to the essence and style of literature and leads us to theories of modernistic literature: how can the use of myth, to which 'mythic' quality is ascribed over and above the mere subject matter, enable literature to reflect reality, when traditional narrative and mimetic techniques do not suffice in modern times?[2] T. S. Eliot's (1888–1965) much quoted citation above primarily relates to narrative texts and is by no means the chief criterion of modernist literature: however, it expresses the tension between recourse to earlier texts with a mythic plot and the desire for innovative aesthetic expression with a clear relevance to the present, and names some originally literary criteria that permit one to identify relevant material for examination. The mythic subject matter can serve as an organizing principle in a text which cannot represent the modern world with its characteristic 'futility and anarchy' by means of traditional narrative methods. The new impulses shaping literature stemmed from psychology, ethnology and comparative religion. The passage from Eliot explicitly mentions James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, with which I shall deal in greater detail at a later point in this chapter.

Not all usages of myth in modern times — here defined as the period after the end of the nineteenth century, when literature sought ways and means to express a new and fragmented world of experience — can be regarded as 'modernist literature', however. This applies in particular to the use of Nordic or *soi-disant* 'Germanic' myths in the countless works of a nationalistic character which emerged in a milieu of the *völkisch* movement. For the multifarious definitions of 'modernist literature' it is sufficient to refer the reader to the standard treatments of the subject. Of continuing value according to Steve Giles is the catalogue of key aesthetic concepts identified by Bradbury and McFarlane (1976) in their influential anthology *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890–1930*: a movement '(1) away from representational realism and towards abstract and autotelic art forms; (2) towards a high degree of aesthetic self-consciousness; (3) towards an aesthetic of radical innovation, fragmentation and shock; (4) towards the breaking of familiar formal and linguistic conventions; (5) towards paradox' (Giles 1993: 172). As regards content, the criteria include the attempt to grapple with a present, felt to be chaotic and meaningless, under the impression of two World Wars — a criterion formulated by Eliot and others — and in addition a preference for self-reflexive

[2] The two-volume work *Modernism*, ed. by Astradur Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska (2007) gives a comprehensive overview of concepts, theories, contexts and differing national developments (including a thorough treatment of 'Borders of Modernism in the Nordic World' in Vol. II).

poetry. Often, and especially in the first half of the twentieth century, the influence of psychoanalytic theory was manifest.

Some of these criteria determined the choice of myths used. Thus the self-reflexive tendency in poetry led to a popularity of myths that dealt with poetry and knowledge. With its kennings Old Norse poetry provided a formal model for abbreviated myths — and thus an early parallel to the mythic method described by Eliot — and also a great wealth of strongly visual descriptions: for example, the portrayal of the poison-spewing Midgard serpent in the context of Ragnarök. Both satisfied the desire for a mode of expression that is visual and rich in metaphor. The reciprocal influence between the various art forms and media was already a characteristic of the great leap forward in the popularization of Norse myth set off by Richard Wagner's opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung* (performed for the first time in its entirety in 1876). It resulted in a great number of adaptations of Norse myth in music, art, literature and everyday culture.

Ever since the post-medieval period and up into modern times, the adoption of Norse myth has taken a back seat in comparison with the classical and biblical myths transmitted by Humanism. A glance at the modernist Danish journal *Klingen* (1917–20) reveals a whole panoply of adaptations of classical myths, but hardly any of Norse myth. The same holds true for Expressionist journals and anthologies in the German-speaking world: only in isolated cases is anything Norse treated, and classical and biblical mythic material predominates.

II.

It comes as no surprise that adaptation of Norse myths is most widespread in the Nordic countries — even in the twentieth century. After all, these myths are best known there, especially through the renditions of Olaus Rudbeck, N. F. S. Grundtvig, Adam Oehlenschläger and Vilhelm Grønbech. Their usage is not confined to the Nordic countries, however: one can point to James Joyce and T. S. Eliot in the Anglophone world, to the Dutchman Herman Gorter or to the Germans Ernst Stadler and Wolfgang Koeppen. But the adoption of Norse myth exists in a magnetic field whose poles are nationalism and internationalism. The tension between the two is part and parcel of the programme: in Pär Lagerkvist's (1891–1971) manifesto *Ordkonst och Bildkonst* ('Verbal Art and Visual Art', 1913) the concept of identity, always endemic to the nationalistic tendency in the use of myth, raises its head. In this manifesto Lagerkvist sets forth the function of 'primitive' art or literature as a model, and in the case of the Scandinavians this means first and foremost that of their own: the

Old Norse sagas and eddic poetry, in whose musical-rhythmic style he hears *brösttonerna i de nordiska språken* ('the sonorous ring of the Nordic languages') (Lagerkvist 1913: 48). But besides this concept of poetry of an indigenous character Lagerkvist praises modern art because it absorbs influences from the most diverse peoples and epochs, *babylonisk-assyrisk och ejyptisk konst, Indiens konst, negerskulptur och primitiv konst överhuvud* ('Babylonian-Assyrian and Egyptian art, the art of India, African sculpture and primitive art in general') (Lagerkvist 1913: 21); in a word, modern art is cosmopolitan. Lagerkvist's two-fold retrospective reflection upon indigenous origins and foreign folklore is typical of the current of primitivism prevalent in art and literature from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards. The retrospective reflection upon the primitive often leads to an interest in the religion, mythology or cults of one's own culture or those of foreign cultures. As Lagerkvist paradigmatically puts it (1913: 53), the poetry of the most primitive peoples *är nästan allt inspirerat av religiösa föreställningar och tankar* ('is almost wholly inspired by religious notions and conceptions').

Primitivism and interest in myth can serve internationalist ends — for example, the search for archetypal conceptions — but they can also be employed to glorify national traditions (cf. von Beyme 2005: 450). Both can be observed in the work of Johannes V. Jensen (1873–1950), winner of the Nobel Prize for literature and 'father' of Danish modernism. In *Æstetik og Udvikling: Efterskrift til Den lange Rejse* ('Aesthetics and Development: Afterword to The Long Journey', 1923) he explains that the conception of myth behind his multipart novel *Den lange Rejse* ('The Long Journey') is rooted in Nordic nature (Jensen 1923: 76, 56).[3] Thus, for example, the Nordic myths about the forest had crystallized in the form of the Ash Yggdrasill (Jensen 1923: 23). Jensen rejects usage of the traditional Norse gods in literature, however, because they had been trivialized by their usage in Grundtvig's work and by the popular practice of naming clubs, ships and industrial products after them. On the basis of the natural conditions, which have remained constant since the earliest times, Jensen invents 'new myths' which can express the history of the Danes in a pithy and vivid manner. These 'new myths' amalgamate information drawn from the mythological tradition

[3] Only the first volume published, *Bræen* ('Glacier', 1908) is euhemeristic in conception: the chief protagonists Dreng ('Boy'; referred to as 'Alfader' ['All-Father'] and one-eyed as a result of a hunting accident) and Hvidbjørn ('Polar Bear', whose most important attribute is a newly designed iron hammer) are venerated by their descendants as gods who establish society, culture and law. They are easily identifiable as Odin and Thor.

with new ideas characteristic of a Darwinist conception of the world. It is striking that Jensen, like T. S. Eliot, in this way attempts to overcome the insufficiency of traditional narrative techniques, and — like T. S. Eliot again (and, moreover, in the same year, 1923) — calls this method of proceeding the 'mythic method' (Jensen 1923: 79, 81; for a more precise elucidation of Jensen's invention of a form 'myth', cf. the section *Roman og myte* ('Novel and Myth') in Jensen 1923: 75–93, 123–125). Since Jensen locates the origin of his myths geographically and historically in Denmark, his use of mythic material is eminently concerned with the indigenous — as his designation of it as *Samlingsbilleder for Slægten* ('symbols of the family') (Jensen 1923: 80) shows. At the same time, however, the classical myth of Prometheus is his model for *Det tabte Land* ('The Lost Country', 1919), the first part of *Den lange Rejse*, and in *Æstetik og Udvikling* Jensen — like Lagerkvist in his manifesto — considers using similarly global material for comparison, in Jensen's case in order to investigate Danish origins: the pygmies in Africa and the Bushmen in the Kalahari desert, the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, the Australian aborigines or the Eskimos (Jensen 1923: 100–03). Thus it seems that Jensen proceeds from the premise of a universal human nature.

Although they are receptive to international influences, both Lagerkvist and Jensen nevertheless find in the poetic tradition of Norse myth a means to express their own times in a literary form that rings truer, is more valid, genuine und effective than would be possible in contemporary literature using customary modes of portrayal. For both it is of paramount importance that this means is an indigenous *Nordic* one — and that it belongs to their concepts of identity. The backward glance to early times in a situation of crisis serves the purpose of tracing in literary form the premises of one's own existence and the origins of one's own culture. Jensen makes this explicit when he says of his novel *Norne-Gæst* (1919), written under the influence of the First World War, that it is *Forsøg paa i sin egen Krog at bygge Haabet op igen [...], Tilværelsen endnu en Gang greben an forfra* ('an attempt to rebuild hope again in one's own corner [...], to begin existence once more from the beginning') (Jensen 1923: 94–95). Jensen calls *The Long Journey* an attempt to put *den naturlige Skabelseshistorie i Stedet for Bibelhistorien* ('the natural history of creation in lieu of the biblical one') (Jensen 1923: 40).

In a similar fashion Martin A. Hansen (1909–55) calls his history of culture and religion *Orm og Tyr* ('The Serpent and the Bull', 1952) *Nordens Gamle Testamente* ('the Old Testament of the North') (Hansen 1952: 8, 345). Like Jensen's multipart novel as well, Hansen's work — whose genre is difficult to determine — aims to trace the present, disturbed as it was after the Second

World War, back to its origins in order to understand it. Hansen sees the downfall of the old gods and the Christianization of Denmark as a parallel to the spirit of 1944, when many rediscovered God afresh after the time of war and crisis. In order to make this clear he follows in Grundtvig's footsteps in portraying the Norse myths as an expression of a Nordic anthropology which has remained valid up to the present (cf. Krejsager 1996: 30). He perceives a contrast between the anti-intellectual Vanir, who are governed by their instincts, and the younger group of gods, the Æsir, who stand for the intellectual dimension but are wracked by doubt and scepticism (Hansen 1952: 136, 142–50; on this, cf. Lundgreen-Nielsen 2008: 90–91). Hansen not only wrote *about* pre-Christian religion, he also made use of mythical material for narrative ends (cf. Mjöberg 1968: 372–88).

In the short novel *Manden fra Jorden* ('The Man from the Earth', published in 1947 in the collection *Agerhønen* ('The Partridge')), he demonstrates the problematic and disturbing relationship between 'the modern' and 'the primitive' by confronting a nameless modern 'I' with the primitive and vigorous 'Man from the Earth'. In a bizarre and dreamlike setting — on a stubble field — 'I' wanders about aimlessly and first rids himself of his cultural costume by taking off his shoes, and then, weary of fruitless reflection, he rids himself of all his intellectual capabilities, which he gives to the spiders in the form of a *Vrimmel af Tanker, der har sværmet i mig og forvildet mig* ('seething mass of thoughts which have swarmed about in me and bewildered me') (Hansen 1961: 224). This 'I' moves in the direction of the sound of a bell and comes upon a cow which is digging a man up out of the earth at the foot of an ash-tree and licking him clean with her tongue. This scene is modelled on Snorri Sturluson's portrayal of the *ur*-cow Auðhumla in *Gylfaginning* ch. 6 (*SnE* 2005: 11), who licks the first 'man', Búri, out of a salty stone. In Hansen's story the ungainly primitive figure approaches the 'I', who feels threatened and attacks him but is no match for his brute strength. The 'I' expresses his realization that 'the modern' is inferior to 'the primitive' with the words: *tak du dine hedenske Guder for, at jeg er saa mat, at jeg næsten ikke kan røre Tungen til at tænke med* ('thank your heathen gods that I am so exhausted that I can hardly move my tongue to think with'). And in his usual emotionless and uninterrupted 'stream-of-consciousness' manner of commenting on what happens, he continues (1961: 228): *Det er mærkeligt, men jo værre, det gaar til, des lettere bliver jeg, synes jeg. [...] Naa, endelig, nu er det altsaa hans Tur, jaja, det anede mig nok* ('It is strange, but the worse things get, the more relieved I become, I feel. [...] So, finally, it is his turn now, oh yes, I already had an inkling of that'). The last words of the dying 'I' are *Gro vel, lille Ask* ('Grow and thrive,

little ash') (1961: 229). In the context of the narrative itself this applies to the bright crown of the ash-tree, *dens finnede Blade var skønne nok til at være det sidste, man saa paa* ('whose fin-like leaves are beautiful enough to be the last thing one glimpses') (1961: 229). But the Auðhumla-scene evokes all that is associated with the Norse creation myths, so that the address to the 'ash' also suggests a reference to the Ash Yggdrasill (cf. *Völuspá* 19) and probably also to the first human being Askr (*Völuspá* 17). Hansen's story has a cyclical structure: at the beginning the aimlessly wandering 'I' moves in a circle back to the place where he took off his shoes and comments (1961: 224): *Det er jo mine Sko, hvordan gaar det til? tænkte jeg, det kunde se ud, som man havde været her, inden man kom* ('But there are my shoes, what is happening? I thought it seemed as though I had been here before I came'). The whole structure of the story has the form of a cyclical movement as well: an uncorrupted primitive man, full of vitality — the first man of Norse myth! — grows up out of the earth and forces the degenerate modern 'I' literally back into the earth.[4]

Such reflection upon and recourse to the concept of the indigenous observable in Jensen's work (as well as in Hansen's *The Serpent and the Bull*) is particularly typical of the exponents of an early phase of modernism in the first half of the twentieth century. Similar conceptions combined with intensive incorporation of Norse myths are to be found in the work of Asger Jorn (1914–73) in the art movement Cobra — both in Jorn's art work and in his writings associated with it (cf. Müller-Wille 2011). After the Second World War, and faced with the Cold War, the use of Norse mythology to serve national ambitions in the context of increasing globalization scarcely plays a role any longer. Now other topics come to the fore: the Cold War, the debate over the relationship between the sexes, the dangers threatening nature and the environment. In Denmark these topics characterize works associated with the Heretica group — such as those of Martin A. Hansen and Ole Wivel — and, in the second half of the twentieth century, for example, those of Per Højholt and Villy Sørensen. (I will deal with these authors at a later point in the chapter.) An example from Sweden is Sara Lidman's (1923–2004) novel *Bära mistel* ('Bearing the Mistletoe', 1960), in which she makes use of Norse myths as a structuring element in the treatment of the debate about the relationship between the sexes and the situation of homosexuals, as well as questions about the position of the artist. Torgny Lindgren's (1938–2017) novel *Kärleksguden Frö: En levnadsteck-*

[4] Hansen mentions this story several times in the course of the year 1947 in his journals: cf. Hansen (1999: 576–77, 582).

ning ('The God of Love Freyr: A Biography', 1988) also deals with the problem of the position of the artist and is copiously illustrated with lithographs by the Swedish artist Peter Dahl (1934–).[5]

In Denmark and Sweden one can distinguish between an early phase of modernism (before the two World Wars) and a later phase, but in Norway and Iceland the situation was different. Until long after the Second World War there were very few Norwegian writers who called the dominant realistic and psychologizing tradition in literature into question with experimental texts. Of importance here is the poet Olav H. Hauge (1908–94), who made his debut in 1946 with the poetry collection *Glør i oska* ('Embers in the Ashes'). He became a favourite with modernist literary critics through his fourth poetry collection (published in 1961), whose title — *På Ørnetuva* ('On the Hillock of the Eagle') — is a translation of the expression *Ara þúfo á* from the eddic poem *Skírnismál*. The Old Norse half-stanza *Skírnismál* 27/1–4 is the motto of the volume: *Ara þúfo á | skaltu ár sitia, | horfa heimi ór, | snugga heliar til*[6] ('On an eagle's mound | you soon shall sit, | looking out of the world, | gazing with expectation to Hel') — these words threaten the giantess Gerðr with the greatest isolation imaginable and with exclusion from society, literally from the world of the living. Leftist intellectual modernists associated with the journal *Profil* were enthusiastic about Hauge's nature poetry and *tingdikt* ('thing-poems'), which corresponded to an ideal formulated by, for example, Espen Haavardsholm (1945–) in his article *Formspråk og virkelighet* ('The Language of Form and Reality', 1966) in which he sets out the poetics of Norwegian modernist literature: an ideal of simple, non-metaphorical sensuousness, but a sensuousness that can transcend itself to make a statement about reality.[7] Hauge often has recourse to motifs from Norse mythology in very diverse ways. Thus, for example, the poem *Dette lyt du bera* ('That you must bear') from the collection *Under bergfallet* ('Beneath the Crag', 1951) weaves in passages adapted from two eddic poems in four stanzas of varying length:

[5] Mats Jansson examines further modern Swedish reworkings of eddic myths, inter alia in the collections of poems *Vid askens rötter* ('At the Roots of the Ash', 1940) by Karl Ragnar Gierow and *Livets värde* ('The Value of Life', 1940) by Anders Österling (cf. Jansson 2000).

[6] The eddic poems are quoted from Neckel 1983.

[7] Significantly, Haavardsholm illustrates his ideal that a poetic image should be sensory and concrete and at the same time abstract by citing the example of the fourth stanza from *Völuspá*, in which the sprouting leek (*løken som springer seg opp mellom steinene*) first has an intrinsic poetic value and then becomes a symbol of creation (Haavardsholm 1966: 392–93).

Dette lyt du bera	**That You Must Bear**
Dette lyt du bera: at du ikkje strakk til, at du var venglande fjør, ikkje oddtung pil i den sterke vinden.	That you must bear: that you did not come up to the mark, that you were a wavering feather not a heavy-pointed arrow in the strong wind.
Du kleiv ikkje bergi, rodde ikkje vatnet, drap ikkje draken, – du kom ikkje då ho, den einaste, ropa.	You did not climb mountains, did not row across the water, did not kill the dragon, you came not when she, the one and only, called.
Um du var snøa med snø, driven med dogg, slegen med regn, skulde du kome. Valund med hogde hælsenar sat, men gjorde seg venger; du sat og smidde leikor åt born.	Even if you were snowed under with snow, drenched with dew, battered by rain, you should have come. Völund sat with severed sinews, but made himself wings; you sat and forged toys for children.
I draumar fær du, ender og gong, kliva bergi, ro vatnet, drepa draken, koma til henne. Soleis vert ditt liv fullbyrda.	In dreams you go now and then to climb mountains, row across the water kill the dragon, come to her. Thus will your life be fulfilled.

(Hauge 2010: 122)

One of the two eddic myths is explicitly named and easily identifiable: the myth of Völund (= Valund), the skilful smith who is captured by the gold-thirsty king Nidud, who maims him by severing the sinews in his knees. The eddic poem *Völundarkviða* relates how Völund takes revenge for the wrong done him: he lures the king's sons to his smithy and kills them, fashions jewellery and drinking cups from their bodies and begets a child on the king's daughter. Völund perfects his revenge on the king by revealing these atrocities to him, before he escapes borne aloft by the artificial wings he has constructed. In Hauge's poem Völund has the character of a hero and is a man of action who overcomes his limitations — the severed sinews which immobilize him — by means of inven-

tive skill, and literally provides himself with wings. The person addressed in the poem as 'you' is contrasted with the mythic smith Völund: whereas Völund kills the children and fashions *from* them 'toys' for their parents, 'you' builds toys *for* children. Völund represents the man of action and by the same token provides a key to the interpretation of the poem, which emphatically portrays the passivity of the person addressed as 'you' as a limitation he must bear ('That you must bear'). With precision the first stanza names perceived inadequacy and lack of purpose as the theme. The second stanza lists the things 'you' has failed to do,[8] the fourth stanza presents a contrast to the second: only in dreams will the life of 'you' be fulfilled, and there only does he do all the things which the second stanza lists as omissions — he climbs mountains, rows across the water, kills the dragon and he comes to the one and only woman. The relationship between dream and reality is clearly central to the poem, and the third stanza is the hinge between the two. In it the Völund myth makes its appearance, but the first half of the stanza refers to yet another eddic poem: the first three lines cite the words the *völva* addresses to Odin in the fifth stanza of the eddic poem *Baldrs draumar*, when the god seeks her out incognito to question her, words in which she complains about the journey which Odin has imposed upon her: *Hvat er manna þat,* | *mér ókunnra,* | *er mér hefir aukit* | *erfit sinni?* | *Var ek snivin snióvi* | *ok slegin regni* | *ok drifin dǫggo,* | *dauð var ek lengi* ('Who is the man, | to me unknown, | that has made me travel | the difficult road? | I was snowed on with snow, | and smitten with rain, | and drenched with dew; | long was I dead'). The *völva*, who in *Baldrs draumar* is simultaneously in the world of the dead, Hel, and in her grave, has knowledge that surpasses that of Odin, but she is excluded from the land of the living. In Hauge's poem her words represent the dream world. Here as later in the motto of the volume *On the Hillock of the Eagle* Hauge uses imagery from Norse mythology as symbols for one of his major themes: existential und insurmountable loneliness.

Only since the end of the 1980s can more numerous examples of the use of Norse myths in Norwegian literature be found, for example, in the work of Tor Obrestad (1938–), who belonged to the group of the aforementioned *Profil*-modernists — in particular his poetry collections *Misteltein* ('Mistetoe', 1987) and *Mimosa, myosotis, rosmarin* ('Mimosa, Forget-me-not, Rosemary', 1994). In *Misteltein* Balder's death stands for a holistic perspective on life and death as inseparable phenomena. The collection is divided into four sections, the

[8] The use of negations in the listing of all the things 'you' should have done is stylistically reminiscent of the *Völuspá* stanzas dealing with cosmogony (sts 3 and 5), which in comparable fashion list all those things as nonexistent that later will constitute the world.

first of which is entitled 'Balder' and begins with three poems about Balder's death, while the last section contains one single poem entitled *Balders bålferd* ('Balder's Journey to the Funeral Pyre'). These two sections form a framework for very heterogeneous poems that deal with love, contemporary politics, nature and everyday events. In them Obrestad sets a joyful-hearted will to live against the awareness of death, as illustrated in the following short poem:

Den blinde truskulda **er alltid utan angst**	**Blind Credulity** **Is Always without Fear**
På sletta, litt til venstre, står den blinde Hòd. Skjelvande siktar han. Eg er i floget, eg ser uskulda når ho handlar og eg ler, ropar — Vent! Her er så vakkert! Så mykje ennå skulle ha vore gjort. Stram bogen, seier Loke. Slepp pila.	On the plain, a little to the left stands the blind Höðr. Trembling he takes aim. I am flying, I see innocence when it acts and I laugh, call out — Wait! It is so beautiful here! So much more still should have been done. Bend the bow, Loki says. Let fly the arrow.

(Obrestad 1987: 7)

Around the year 2000, Old Norse themes become more prominent in Norwegian literature. Thus in *Hun: Dikt over Voluspå* ('She: Poems about *Völuspá*', 1989; on this see below), *Vindkald* ('Wind-Cold', 2001) and *Brageseilet* ('Brage's Sail', 2003) Erling Kittelsen (1946–) engages in a dialogue with eddic and skaldic poetry (*Völuspá*, *Grógaldr*, *Fjölsvinnsmál* and *Ragnarsdrápa*), which he translates and comments upon and to which he adds continuations or 'anti-poems'. After the year 2000 Cornelius Jakhelln (1977–), who has a doctorate in philosophy and is a Black Metal musician, makes copious use of eddic mythology, both in a number of collections of poetry (*Yggdraliv: Quadra natura 0011*, 2004; *Fagernorn: Quadra natura 0111*, 2006; *Galderhug/Spellmind: Quadra Natura 1111*, 2008) and in his experimental prize-winning novel *Gudenes Fall* ('The Downfall of the Gods', 2007).

In Iceland the native literary tradition has remained so strongly dominant that it long precluded international influences. But there are exceptions: the lyrical prose cycle of stories *Hel* by the Nordic philologist Sigurður Nordal (1886–1974, in *Fornar astir* ('Ancient Loves', 1919, pp. 103-59) has been termed one of the earliest modernist texts in Icelandic literature. In this work Nordal is ahead of his time — for Iceland — in his choice of themes and nar-

rative forms typical of the twentieth century. The major character, Álfur from Vindhæli, represents the inability of modern man to commit himself to a single place, partner or task. Eternally young, at the end of his life Álfur realizes that he has always remained in a state of potentiality, whereas the world around him, at which he has always scoffed, can look back upon a life which, albeit hard, is rich in deep feelings and multifaceted. Variations of this theme are played out in eight independent sections that are nevertheless related to one another and adopt a shifting point of view. Over long stretches the style can be called 'lyrical prose'. After his death Álfur comes to Hel, who here is not an eerie goddess of death but rather a kind, motherly goddess of forgetfulness who reunites Álfur with his first love. Just how unusual this kind of writing was in Iceland in 1919 can be divined when one reads the review in *Skírnir*, the first sentence of which rejects the criticism that *Fornar ástir* is 'un-Icelandic' (Árni Pálsson 1920: 60–63; on *Hel*, cf. Glauser 2006: 264–65).

Only after the Second World War did modernist tendencies in poetry become more widespread in Iceland. In the opening poem entitled *Í úlfdölum* ('In the Wolf-Valleys') in his collection *Kvæði* ('Poems') from 1944 Snorri Hjartarson (1906–86) makes use of the eddic poem *Völundarkviða*. The theme of the poem is the situation of the forsaken Völund and is composed in a metre that resembles the eddic metre *fornyrðislag*. The poem invokes the power of poetry and the ever-renewed power of poetic inspiration (Snorri Hjartarson 1944: 7–11). Other poets increasingly deal with the themes of the endangered natural environment and the threat of nuclear war. An example is Hannes Pétursson's (1931–) poem *Í helli Loka* ('In Loki's Cave', first published in 1954 in *Stúdentablað* ('The Students' Newspaper', 31 no. 2, 36), then in *Kvæðabók* ('Book of Poems') 1955: 37): the poison from the snake, which drips on Loki when the bowl in which it collects must be emptied from time to time, enlarges the wounds of the earth — Loki becomes a rather skewed image for the earth. Motifs and expressions such as *vá býr í lofti* ('evil lives in the air', cf. *Völuspá* 41, *veðr ǫll válynd* 'all weather vicious') intentionally allude to the approaching destruction of the world. The situation of the world and the environment is omnipresent in the poetry of the modernist generation of poets known as the 'atom poets' around the middle of the twentieth century. As a result they seek means to adopt internationally current forms of expression in order to treat a radically altered reality in an adequate manner. In his self-reflexive poem *Á þessari rímlausu skeggöld* ('In this Rhymeless Axe-Age', published in 1962 in *Óljóð* ('Unsongs'), 7–12), Jóhannes úr Kötlum (1899–1972) deals with this endeavour and cites Archibald MacLeish's categorical statement about modernist aesthetics: 'a poem should not mean but be' (in *Ars poetica*, 1926). The title

of Jóhannes's poem evokes the characterization of the Last Days as a *skeggöld, skálmöld* ('axe-age, sword-age') in *Völuspá* 45/7 and applies it to contemporary poetry. Further quotations from *Völuspá* reinforce this message and raise the question of whether there will be a turning point to a new era (Jóhannes 1962: 11): *er ekki kominn tími til að leita í grasinu | eða eru myntfalsararnir búnir að gleypa hinar gullnu töflur* ('has the time not come to look in the grass | or are the counterfeiters ready to devour the golden playing pieces?'; cf. the description of the new world in *Völuspá* 61).

Svava Jakobsdóttir's (1930–2004) novel *Gunnlaðar saga* ('The Saga of Gunnlöð', 1987) expresses the central concerns of post-war modernism in exemplary form. The novel combines questions relating to contemporary society with those of environmental protection in the atomic age, and it does this in the context of the Cold War and from a feminist point of view. In addition it poses the question of the role poetry and historiography play in the establishment of social power. The novel is based on the myth of Odin's theft of the mead of poetry from the giantess Gunnlöð transmitted in *Hávamál* 104–10 and in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G57 (*SnE* 1998: 1, 3–5). Svava interprets this myth, about which she also published a scholarly article (Svava Jakobsdóttir [1988]), as a social revolution, whose chief protagonist is the young Odin. Gunnlöð, as representative of the highest goddess, is to consecrate Odin as ruler in a sacred ceremony: she gives him a drink in a golden cup and consummates a *hieros gamos* with him in order to secure the peace and plenty of the kingdom. Odin and his advisor Loki betray Gunnlöð, however, steal the golden cup and establish a new, patriarchal order of society, an 'iron age' characterized by belligerent modes of action and (excessive) exploitation of natural resources. From a feminist standpoint, the novel castigates the harmful effects of this 'masculine' mode of thinking and acting, among them, for example, the destruction of the environment caused by the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Using a narrative technique that moves freely from one time level and character level to another and employs the modernist procedures of magic realism, Svava interweaves the pre-Christian story with one from the 1980s. In the latter a young Icelandic woman named Dís ('[Mythic] Woman') is accused of attempting to steal a precious golden ritual bowl from the Danish National Museum. Dís, however, maintains that she had been mystically drawn into the reflecting surface of the bowl as if into a maelstrom and been conflated with Gunnlöð; thereupon the glass case splintered without her having touched it. The major narrative voice is that of Dís's mother: although she is initially sceptical about her daughter's stories of the deception of Gunnlöð, in the end she assumes the task of 're-conquering' the cup and establishing a platform to raise the con-

sciousness of the public about the betrayal of the cause of women. Time and again the mother's narrative voice is overlaid with or interrupted by the voice of Dís or Gunnlöð. The cup stolen by Odin in mythic time and by Dís and her mother in the twentieth century is a symbol for control over content and direction of public opinion: with the first theft Odin invents the story of a foolish giantess who allows herself to be erotically gulled and thus relinquishes control over the art of poetry — this is the version that through Snorri's account in *Skáldskaparmál* has defined the image of Gunnlöð down to the present day. With the theft of the cup, Gunnlöð, Dís and her mother demand restitution of power — at least control over the storyline, which can only be reconstructed on the basis of the stanzas from *Hávamál*.

Outside Nordic countries, reworkings of Old Norse poetry cannot, as they can there, be justified by the unqualified claim to be a recourse to a 'native' cultural tradition. In the Anglophone world interest in Norse mythology has always had a strongly international and syncretistic touch, as, for example, the mention of Odin among many other outmoded gods in Walt Whitman's (1819-82) *Leaves of Grass* shows (Whitman 1971 [1855]: 45). The syncretistic use of myth took a giant step forward through the agency of James G. Frazer's (1854–1941) major work *The Golden Bough*, which exerted a strong influence on numerous writers. Written by an anthropologist with an education in the classics, this comparative study of religion first appeared in two volumes in 1890 and subsequently swelled to fill twelve volumes. It describes multitudinous and disparate cults of a god who dies and is resurrected and the beneficial power he exerts on the fertility of his land. Two of the myths extensively dealt with are those of Odin's self-sacrifice and Balder's death (Frazer 1922: 354–55 and 607–09, 658–67 respectively).[9] Frazer's study is an example of T. S. Eliot's 'mythic method' *avant la lettre*, in that it parallelizes myths that are widely disparate in time and place so that they appear to elucidate one another reciprocally. In his verse epic *The Waste Land* (1922), a key work of modernist poetry, Eliot employs a comparable technique: a montage of myths, materials and allusions to other texts,[10] amongst them references to passages from the Bible, to myths and rituals, citations from Ovid, Dante, Shakespeare, Wagner and Baudelaire, but also contemporary slogans and (musical) hits. Into this space-and-time-embracing tapestry of allusions are woven various references to

[9] On the context and influence of this work within the history of religion. cf. Kippenberg (1997: 128–42).

[10] On the numerous allusions and references to other texts, etc., cf. the contexts listed in Eliot (2001); on Frazer, cf. Eliot (2001: 29–34).

Norse myths: in the first section, 'The Burial of the Dead', Eliot lists a number of (genuine or fictitious) tarot cards, among them 'the one-eyed merchant' and 'The Hanged Man' (Eliot 2001: 7). The association of these designations with the one-eyed god Odin and his self-sacrifice (as described in the eddic poem *Hávamál*) is not fortuitous but intended, as Eliot explicitly says in one of his numerous annotations to the poem. In this annotation he makes a connection between 'The Hanged Man' and Frazer's concept of the hanged god (Note on v. 46, Eliot 2001: 6, 22). In all likelihood Eliot assumes that the reader knows that this sacrifice of the god to himself is intended to make the land fertile. Like Frazer, Eliot regards myths as an expression of universal human dispositions, independent of their original time and place. In the case of Frazer's depiction of primitive societies and their customs there is usually at most a subtext that the description (also) explains the irrationality of modern, civilized societies. In Eliot's poetry, however, the present is the given context, to which the interwoven myths and allusions refer.[11]

The long and complex poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) by the Scot Hugh MacDiarmid (i.e., Christopher Murray Grieve, 1892–1972) is experimental in form and use of language. MacDiarmid, who attempted to create a new Scottish literary language, composes a long dramatic monologue by interweaving the most diverse metrical forms, levels of style such as satire, burlesque, parody and a great number of allusions to classical and modern texts (inter alia to Russian, French and German literature) — and also allusions to Norse myths (MacDiarmid 1987). Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–73) tried his hand at a translation of the eddic poems with Paul Beekman Taylor in *The Elder Edda* (1969) and also made use of eddic motifs in his poetry (cf. O'Donoghue 2010). Like George Mackay Brown and Seamus Heaney he is, however, more interested in the culture of the Vikings and in the literary model of the sagas than in the Norse myths (on MacDiarmid, Mackay Brown and Heaney, cf. O'Donoghue 2004: 184–99). A poem by the American Marianne Moore (1887–1972) provides an example of reciprocal influence between art forms. Moore composed her poem 'In Einar Jonsson's "Cow"' in 1915, inspired by the sculpture entitled *Ymir and Auðhumbla* (1907–09) of the Icelander Einar Jónsson (1874–1954). The first lines are 'Here we have thirst, | And patience from the first'. In May 1915 the *American-Scandinavian Review* declined to publish the poem; after the final two lines had been reworked the poem was published in Moore's collection *Observations* (1924) with the title 'An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish' (cf. *Marianne Moore Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1978), 8–12;

[11] The same is true of the novels of James Joyce, as is discussed in Chapter 6.1.2 below.

Moore 2004: 173, 413). A further phenomenon of modern literature is the use of Norse myths in fantasy literature; the intense interest of the two key authors William Morris (1834–96) and J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973) in medieval Norse literature made Norse mythology from the very beginning of the development of the genre a central part of the traditions used.[12]

Adaptation of Norse myth in the German-speaking countries has some features peculiar to itself — the reasons behind this are discussed elsewhere in this volume (see Chapters 2.1, 3.5, 4.1, 5.1, 9.1, 9.2 and 10.1). One of them is a long-standing interest in myth that can draw upon an equally long tradition of theoretical examination of myth in the nineteenth century. From Goethe and Hölderlin to the 'new mythology' of the Romantic era, and later from Bachofen and Wagner to Nietzsche, German-speaking intellectuals have shown a predilection for mythic conceptions that stand in stark contrast to the sceptical stance vis-à-vis myth in French and Anglophone literature (cf. Borchmeyer 1994: 300–01). There is a preponderance of classical myth, however, and recourse to Norse mythology remains a peripheral phenomenon. Even the fact that these Norse myths in the nineteenth and early twentieth century are widely regarded as 'Germanic' or even 'German myths' does not make any major difference (cf. Hartwich 2000: 47–76), but it does have the effect that these myths — perceived as belonging to 'native' tradition and pertaining to the concept of identity — are pressed into service in the context of national ideologies. And what is 'native' defines itself by distinguishing between itself and what is foreign (especially the culture of the Romance language countries). Knowledge of Norse myth and legend reaches a wider circle by means of handbooks and surveys of the whole field aimed at a non-academic public and also by means of popular renderings and narratives such as the novels of Felix Dahn (1834–1912). None of these German works became a literary model that enjoyed canonical status as was the case in Denmark with Oehlenschläger and in Sweden with Tegnér, in Norway with the poetry of Wergeland or allusion to mythic motifs in the work of Bjørnson or Ibsen. But the culture of the German-language countries does have a catalyst whose influence in the adaptation of Norse myth dominates far beyond the German-speaking world: Richard Wagner's theory of myth and its implementation in his *Gesamtkunstwerk The Ring of the Nibelung*.[13] Wagner recreates 'German mythology' anew as a national religion of art. The effect of this religion is highly diverse: when its fictional character is recognized, it inspires modern literature (and other art forms) to projects that

[12] On the use of Norse myth in fantasy literature, see Chapter 6.2 below.

[13] On this, cf. Hartwich (2000: 139–59) and Chapter 4.1 in the present volume.

deal with the conditions of modernity in aesthetically innovative ways. When however this 'Germanic' mythology is perceived without any aesthetic distance, this leads to anti-modernist tendencies that harken back to a mythic past of a nationalistic cast. As a reaction against this, Norse myths in Wagnerian 'costume' are widely employed for satiric ends, as in the *Bekenntnis* ('Confession') of the Expressionist poet Albert Ehrenstein (1886–1950):

> Als die Nachricht vom Sturz der Habsbürger und Höchstenzollern gen Walhall drang, fielen die Götter auf den Hintern und erschraken gar sehr. 'Die Funker' — neue Feuerriesen zweifelsohne — waren im Anmarsch. 'Dieser Ebert! Scheidemann naht!' sagte Altgraf Wodan furchtsam, verfärbt, ergrauend. Aufflammten Tage, da die Besitzer allen Besitzes unsicher auf den Gipfelsitzen herumrutschten [...]. (Ehrenstein 1919: 1)

> (When the news of the fall of the Habsburgs and the Highest-Zollerns reached Wallhall, the gods fell on their backsides and were seized with great fear. 'The wireless-operators' — doubtless new fire-giants [German *Funker* could be translated literally as 'sparkers'] — were advancing. 'This Ebert! Scheidemann is approaching!' said the old count Wodan fearfully, blanching, growing grey. Days blazed up, when the possessors of all possessions fidgeted about unsteadily on the summit-chairs [...].)[14]

Even after the Second World War Wolfgang Koeppen (1906–96), for example, employed expressions reminiscent of the *Ring of the Nibelung* to characterize the national mustiness that had survived the war and pervaded the Bonn Republic, which he metaphorically termed the *Treibhaus* ('Hothouse'), a designation he used as the title of his novel *Das Treibhaus* (1953).

Apart from satire, there are only isolated examples of a freer adaptation of Norse myth. One of them stems from the writer and painter Lothar Schreyer (1886–1966), who composed an Expressionist reworking of the eddic poem *Skírnismál* in the drastic diction of his time, as the passage with the curse the messenger of the god Freyr directs at the giantess Gerðr illustrates, a passage whose overtones cannot be rendered into English adequately (Schreyer 1920: 4):

> Kreise Leichengeburt / Geister starren grauen Dir | Menschen starren grauen Dir | Heulen haucht Dein Schlund | Hass Hass Hass | Schleppe Hass | Schleppe Dich | Krieche | Lecke Aas | Qual Qual | [...] | Missgeburt zerkeimt Deinen Leib | Greife Giere in die Leere | Dorren | Zernichten | Stäbe Stäbe glittern grimme Störrichte zahm.

[14] Philipp Scheidemann and Friedrich Ebert were leading German politicians of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and respectively the first Chancellor and President of the Weimar Republic in 1919.

> (Circle, corpse-birth, | Ghosts stare at, strike you with horror | Human beings stare at you, strike you with horror | Your gullet breathes howls | Hate Hate Hate | Drag Hate | Drag yourself | Creep | Lick carrion | [...] | A monstrous birth dissolves your body | Greed grabs at emptiness | Wither | Annihilate | Staves staves glitter vex stubborn ones tame.)

The poems of the painter and writer Otto Nebel (1892–1973) are precursors of experimental literature — *Zuginsfeld* ('Moving-into-the-Field [of Battle]', in *Der Sturm* 10-11 (1920–21)) and especially *Unfeig: Eine Neun-Runen-Fuge zur Unzeit gegeigt* ('Uncowardly: A Nine-Rune-Fugue Played at the Wrong Time'; composed in 1923, first published in *Der Sturm* 15–16 (1924–25), revised version printed in Zürich in 1960; cf. Nebel 2006: 77). Time and again by means of citation collages and associative play on words they evoke among other things Norse myths, and in the case of *Eine Neun-Runen-Fuge* these are a major structural element. After the Second World War it was not until the 1970s that experimental reworkings of Norse myths were composed again in the German-language countries: for example, the prose poem *Die Heimholung des Hammers* ('The Recuperation of the Hammer'; Bremer and Artmann 1977) published in Vienna in 1977 by Hans Carl Artmann (1921–2000, text) and Uwe Bremer (1940–, illustrations). It is an adaptation of *Þrymskviða* that teems with coarse and risqué plays on words with baroque eloquence and is interspersed with alliterating expressions and a few bits of pseudo-Old Norse ('Hraustrautr hrimsrakk!'). Time and again the reliability of the skald is called into question. A free translation of the first stanza of *Þrymskviða* precedes the text: *Sauer war da Schwing-Thor* | *als er erwachte* | *und ihm kein Hammer lachte* ('Vexed was Swing-Thor | when he awakened | and no hammer smiled at him'). It is accompanied by a fictitious name of its source — 'Middle Edda' (the correct one would be 'Elder Edda' or 'Poetic Edda') — that surely expresses an ironic distance from philological *Quellenkritik*. Artmann's work is a modern exponent of the burlesque tradition of *Þrymskviða* adaptations: in its use of language, its content and last but not least its illustrations, grotesque colour etchings by Uwe Bremer, reminiscent of machine installations.

In other countries as well modern poets turned to and reworked motifs from Nordic mythology. Thus the Dutchman Herman Gorter (1864–1927) made use of figures from the Norse pantheon in a very free manner in his epic poem *Mei* ('May', 1889). It is characterized by neologisms, a free sentence structure and impressionistic descriptions of nature. The theme is the love that May, the personification of the month, bears for Balder: charmed by his song and his beauty, she follows him from earth to the heaven of the gods, and then,

rejected by him, dies on the seashore. The first line of the epic poem is one of the most frequently cited lines of poetry in Dutch literature and expresses the will for renewal that characterizes Gorter's debut poem: *Een nieuwe lente en een nieuw geluid* ('A new springtime and a new tone'). The Columbian exponent of magic realism, Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), used motifs from the tradition of Völundr in his story 'Un señor muy viejo con unas alas enormes' ('A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings'; García Márquez 1975: 213–20). Another poet who repeatedly made Norse myths the subject of his poetry is the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986).[15]

In France, adaptation of either myth or heroic legend is frequently sparked by the work of Richard Wagner. Paul Claudel (1868–1955), for instance, discusses in *Richard Wagner: rêveri d'un poète français* the relation between Northern or German mentality and the interest in eddic myth, and he has one of the two protagonists remark:

> C'ést curieux comme le protestantisme et la philosophie allemande s'allient naturellement avec le sombre paganisme de la forge islandaise! Ainsi dans ces mornes drames d'Ibsen, Solness par exemple ou le petit Eyolf, et Strindberg c'est pareil, on voit nettement apparaître la face barbouillée de sang et de suie des démons de l'Edda. (Claudel 1934: 281–82).
>
> (It is curious how German Protestantism and philosophy are natural allies of sombre paganism emanating from the Icelandic forge. Thus in those gloomy dramas of Ibsen, like *Solness* or *Little Eyolf*, and Strindberg is similar, one clearly sees the dirty face of blood and grime of the Edda demons.)

Hélène Cixous's (1937–) play *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)* ('The Story (That One Will Never Know)', 1994) may be considered an effort to wash both blood and grime from the Edda's face: Cixous stages the story of Brunhild and Sigfrid, Kriemhild and Gunther (using these names from the *Nibelungenlied*), as well as the character Snorri Sturluson, who is commissioned by his father Sturla Thorardson [*sic*] and by the Norse gods *Grand Très-Haut, Égal du Très-Haut et Petit Très-Haut* ('Big Very-High, Equal to Very-High and Little Very-High') to continue this story and bring it to a bloody end. Snorri, however, favours a happy ending, which brings him into conflict with *vieille Edda* ('old Edda'). To begin with, she insists upon the traditional plot which she claims to have woven into a tapestry aeons ago. As the story continues and both the

[15] On the use of Norse myths in Russian modernist, especially symbolist, literature, cf. Bergmann (1995) and Nilsson (1987). On their usage in French literature, cf. especially Boyer (1986: 161–212).

protagonists and Edda dispute with the narrator — Snorri — Edda changes her mind. Snorri is then killed by Hagen. Edda, however, convinces him to rise from the dead, and together they succeed in preventing Kriemhild's revenge for Sigfrid's murder by making Brunhild transform herself into a great snowfall, literally blanketing revengefulness and the way to destruction for Kriemhild and reuniting Sigfrid, Kriemhild and herself in a sweet and blinding whiteness. Edda and Snorri affirm the beauty of this ending which diverges from the given tragic one:

> Edda: Qu'il est beau cet amour tout entouré de neige! Et personne pour raconter comment tout a commencé, tout a fini, tout autrement que dans ma vieille tapisserie?
>
> Snorri: Personne ne racontera jamais notre histoire.
>
> Edda: C'est une tragédie. (183–84).
>
> (Edda: 'How beautiful is this love, all surrounded by snow! And there is no one to tell how it all started or ended in any other way than in my old tapestry.'
>
> Snorri: 'No one will ever be able to tell our story.'
>
> Edda: 'It is a tragedy.')

With its death of the author, the calling into question of the tragic and the attempt to interrupt the end and to leave some blank space and indetermination in the plot, *L'Histoire* is markedly postmodern[16] — and decidedly feminist in criticizing the typical male quest for the heroic.

Two decades before Cixous's metapoetical play, the French playwright Michel Vinaver (1927–) introduced Old Norse myth as an ironic comment on the capitalist strategies of a toilet paper manufacturing business in his experimental play *Par-dessus bord* ('Overboard', published in 1972).[17]

III.

The myths chosen by modernist writers for innovative ends often lend themselves thematically to this purpose. Thus the complex of myths relating to Baldr's death and return serves as a narrative of a time of change that expresses hope for a happy future; in times of crisis writers turn to apocalyptic visions

[16] On Cixous as a playwright, bringing an exiled, female voice to the stage in a male-dominated theatrical culture, cf. Lindley (2014).

[17] On Michel Vinaver, cf. Bradby (1991: 247–55).

and the themes associated with Ragnarök. Social problems such as the exploitation of workers and the control exerted by machines over men are repeatedly expressed by means of the image of the mill Grotti. The character of poetry and the circumstances necessary for artistic creation find their expression in the use of Norse myths involving poetry — the origin and theft of the mead of poetry or the myth of Odin's acquisition of the runes. Sometimes the theme of artistic creativity is connected with more general ideas of fertility as associated with the god Freyr, for example, in the collection of poems *Flateyjar-Freyr* ('Freyr of Flatey', 1978) by Guðbergur Bergsson (1932–) or in Torgny Lindgren's previously mentioned novel *Kärleksguden Frö: en levnadsteckning*. Myths that can transmit an image of women with fighting spirit find favour when it is a question of the relation between the sexes. In what follows, some examples of these kinds of thematic uses of Norse myth are presented without any claim to being comprehensive.

Of Crisis and War

Works such as Jensen's *Den lange rejse* ('The Long Journey') or Hansen's *Orm og Tyr* ('The Serpent and the Bull') reacted to the upheavals of war by depicting in literary form how human society begins again anew. By way of contrast, one could say that Villy Sørensen (1929–2001) goes in the opposite direction in *Ragnarok: En gudefortælling* ('The Downfall of the Gods', 1982). As his point of departure he does not take the establishment of the order of society but rather society's final and definitive destruction at Ragnarök, which in the era of the Cold War takes the form of a nuclear catastrophe which neither Gimlé, the home of the righteous who survive Ragnarök, nor any other new world follow. From this terminal point Sørensen constructs a plot that moves backwards to the point at which Ragnarök could have been prevented.

With his literary first-born *Sære historier* ('Strange Stories', 1953) Sørensen became a central figure of Danish modernist prose; with *Ragnarok* he produced a small masterpiece, a retelling of Norse mythology that adhered closely to the 'facts' of the medieval sources but was a commentary on and contribution to contemporary political debates that was a subject of discussion in the press for weeks. Thus in his own way he put Eliot's previously cited 'programme' into practice: 'in using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity [...] giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'. Sørensen's story is intended for children and adults alike, and on the surface his style is simple and fairy-tale-like, but it reveals itself to be highly ironic and verbally

self-reflexive. Time and again it exposes hackneyed phrases or unquestioned assumptions: for example, when Odin puts an end to a quarrel in the court of the gods with the words *Mødet er hævet* ('The meeting is adjourned', Sørensen 1982: 19); when the relationship between men and gods is expressed (Sørensen 1982: 36): *Guderne hørte selvfølgelig menneskenes bønner, men de kunne umuligt opfylde dem alle, da de forskellige mennesker ikke just bad om det samme* ('It goes without saying that the gods heard the prayers of men, but it was impossible for them to fulfil all their requests because the various people didn't ask for the same things'); or when Balder debunks the confrontational politics of Odin and Thor by saying: *I taler som om vi kunne blive angrebet af jætter hvert øjeblik. Men det er jo os — det er jo dig, Thor — der angriber dem* ('You talk as though we could be attacked by giants at any moment. But it's us — it's you, Thor — who attack them') (Sørensen 1982: 39). The wittiness of *Ragnarok* is produced by its mixed levels of language and style. Yet the involuntary laughter at comic contrasts comes to a sudden halt for the experienced reader who is aware of the inescapable contemporary parallels. One has an inkling of this when one sees the cover illustration by Andy Li Jørgensen, which introduces an atomic mushroom cloud into a depiction of Ragnarök reminiscent of Louis Moe or Lorenz Frølich. The parallel between myth and the present called for by Eliot is easy to decode when one looks for it, that is, does not remain a naive childlike reader caught up in the fairy-tale world of the text.[18] This parallel conspicuously resembles the contrast between the First and so-called Third World: the world of the gods is characterized by prosperity and a birth-rate which has declined to nil. It is a society which is democratic, at least in a formal sense, and in which one group (especially the Vanir) advocates disarmament and dialogue with the giants, while the 'government' (Odin, aided and abetted in particular by Tyr and Thor) steps up armament and aims to secure its own position of power and the strength of its own community by accentuating its difference from the Other — the giants, who live in barren regions under unfavourable living conditions and proliferate at a high rate. *Ragnarok* distances itself markedly both from the medieval mythological texts and from the later ones of Oehlenschläger, Grundtvig or Grønbech, not by altering the 'facts' of the mythic world but by means of the choices the author makes of which episodes to present (and which to omit), and also through focalization and narrative voice. This leads to certain perspectives and the calling into question of matters in a way that is unthink-

[18] The first words of the text *Det var engang en verden* ('Once upon a time there was a world', Sørensen 1982: 7) evoke the genre of the fairy-tale. This work is also considered in Chapter 6.3.2 below on children's literature.

able from a medieval standpoint: in particular, the dominant Æsir-centric perspective is problematized. *Ragnarok* is a narrative that stands under the overwhelming impression of the threat of nuclear weapons: faced with the half-life of nuclear fallout that makes any life on earth impossible for thousands of years there is no longer any possibility of conceiving that downfall and destruction have a purifying function, at least as a side-effect.

Until after the Second World War the image of Ragnarök and the — more or less closely associated — myth of Baldr's death and return transmitted the idea of complete refining purification, upon the basis of which a new and better world would follow. In the German-speaking world messianic ideas were linked with Balder, as Bismark's so-called Hödur-speeches show: in them Balder incarnates the blooming German Empire, which is murdered by Loki — factionalism, particularly that of the liberals — and Hödur — the uncomprehending voter, led astray by the press.[19] This imagery was apparently comprehensible to the general public, and after 1900 it found widespread expression in *völkische Weihespiele* (initiation rituals in dramatic form and of a nationalistic tendency), which make use of the myth of Balder's return to evoke national rebirth.[20] Other mostly conservative-minded poets also make use of the myth of Balder, for example, Stefan George (1868–1933) in his poem *Der Krieg* ('The War', 1917), published as a pamphlet. In a highly condensed and abbreviated form, very difficult to decode, it evokes the myths of Ragnarök, preceded by the Fimbulwinter, and the return of Balder. They are superimposed upon one another and also overlaid with classical and biblical myths (George 2001: 21–26, here 26; for a thorough investigation, cf. Zernack 2009). To the Alsatian poet Ernst Stadler (1883–1914), who is regarded as one of the most influential early Expressionists, Balder's death represents the annunciation of a 'new dawn': The cycle of poems entitled *Baldur: Bruchstücke einer Dichtung* ('Baldur: Fragments of a Poem'), originally published

[19] In a speech in the German Reichstag, the Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–98) used this simile in the context of a debate on the colonies on 2 March 1885; on 13 March 1885 he extended the application of this *Analogie unserer deutschen Geschichte mit unserer deutschen Göttersage* ('analogy between our German history and our German legend of the gods'), which had *in den letzten 20 Jahren ununterbrochen gequält und beunruhigt* ('tormented and troubled [him] without interruption for the last 20 years'), to include the entire welfare of the young German nation; the proceedings/records of the speeches in the Reichstag can be found under <www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt3_k6_bsb00018451_00106.html> and <www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt3_k6_bsb00018451_00403.html> (accessed 18 February 2013).

[20] On this anti-modern way of using Norse myths that nevertheless is inseparably bound up with the modern age, cf. e.g. von Schnurbein (1994: 87–102) and Neufert (2011: 267–91). See further Chapters 5.1 and 9.2 in this volume.

in 1902 in the journal *Der Stürmer* by the group of artists known as *Das jüngste Elsaß* ('The Youngest Alsace'), is a synthesis of the myths of Balder, Christ and Prometheus. The sections entitled *Baldurs Traum* ('Balder's Dream'), *Baldurs Tod* ('Balder's Death'), *Totenfahrt* ('Death Journey'), *Prometheus*, *Baldur-Christus* ('Balder-Christ'), *Gethsemane* and '*Finale* "Aus tiefsten Nächten dämmern neue Morgenröten"' ('Finale "Out of the deepest nights new dawns break"'; Stadler 1954: 168–78) sketch a religious cycle in which a religion in decline always brings forth a new one.

While Norse myths are omnipresent in publications emanating from the German *völkisch* movement and especially in political propaganda (particularly but by no means exclusively in the German-speaking world; on this, cf. Zernack 2011), use of the Ragnarök myth and other specifically Norse myths is conspicuous by its nearly total absence in the poetry composed under the influence of the First World War, whether it be the jingoistic poetry of the time around 1914 or the literature written after 1918 under the impression of defeat. The reason for this may lie in the popularity of these myths in circles characterized by German nationalism: in these circles the defeat was explained by the lack of support for the German army — unconquered on the field of battle — among the civilians at home, referred to as the so-called *Dolchstoßlegende* ('the legend of the stab in the back'). This term contains a comparison of the defeat to the death of Siegfried in the Nibelung legend: the unconquerable German army had fallen *wie Siegfried unter dem hinterlistigen Speerwurf des grimmigen Hagen* ('like Siegfried by the treacherous spear thrown by grim Hagen', in the words of the later Reichspräsident Paul von Hindenburg in his memoirs of 1920). By means of allusions to the Poetic Edda, the death of the soldiers was interpreted as an entrance into Valhalla, and the bereaved survivors were comforted by reference to 'the fame of a dead man's deeds' (*Hávamál* 77; on this, cf. Zernack 2011). By contrast, literary allusions to Norse myths, often in the guise in which they appear in Wagner's work, are in the majority parodic or satirical allusions to the Germanomania ('delusions of Germanic grandeur') current in the nationalistic circles mentioned above. To this end, it sometimes suffices to cite a collage of relevant texts without commentary in a new context, as, for example, in the column *Ich schneide die Zeit aus* ('I make clippings of our time') regularly published by Franz Pfemfert (1879–1954) in the Expressionist journal *Die Aktion* ('The Action', 1911–32), edited by him. In this column he allowed texts from the daily press to comment upon one another. Thus the appeal of the *Vertreter der deutschen Wissenschaft und Kunst* ('representatives of German scholarship, science and art'), which categorically denies Germany's responsibility and desire for the war, is followed by the poem *Predigt an das*

deutsche Volk ('Sermon before the German Nation') which was published in the *Berliner Zeitung* on 25 August 1914 by Richard Dehmel (1863–1920) — one of those who signed the appeal, and in which he invokes Odin the god of war, Thor the thunderer and the Valkyries against the *Feindesrotte* ('horde of the enemy').[21] Of Wagnerian inspiration is the allusion to Ragnarök in the title of the influential anthology of expressionist lyric poetry edited by Kurt Pinthus (1886–1975), *Menschheitsdämmerung: Symphonie jüngster Dichtung* ('The Twilight of Humanity: A Symphony of the Most Recent Poetry', 1919). Apart from this title, which is a drastic expression of the horror of war, the entire anthology significantly contains not one single example of the usage of Norse myth — but numerous reworkings of classical or biblical subjects.

All nations involved in the First World War were faced with the necessity of giving a meaning to a hitherto inconceivable number of war dead. Here James G. Frazer's work *The Golden Bough* played an important role, as it opened up the possibility of giving the mass deaths in the era of the World Wars a more-than-personal significance. Frazer himself in part lays the groundwork for an application of cultic rituals to the war scenario: he graphically depicts the sacrifice of Adonis and explicitly compares it to the earth drenched by the blood shed in war, which subsequently brings forth a multitude of red flowers:

> In the summer after the battle of Landen [now in Belgium, 1693], the most sanguinary battle of the seventeenth century in Europe, the earth, saturated with the blood of twenty thousand slain, broke forth into millions of poppies, and the traveller who passed that vast sheet of scarlet might well fancy that the earth had indeed given up her dead. (Frazer 1922: 340)

The Golden Bough was highly influential on an international scale. On the one hand it gave impetus to the interpretation of the sacrifices of war as a kind of sacrifice for the renewal of modern societies, and on the other to the syncretistic interweaving of all conceivable mythologies. Its influence can be observed far into the twentieth century in order to provide war with a significant context.

This was the case in Sweden, where Frazer's own abridged edition of *The Golden Bough* (1922) appeared in a translation by Ernst Klein in 1925. Thus Artur Lundkvist (1906–91) made use of the popular adaptation of Frazer to give meaning to the present under the threat of war by reference in his poetry

[21] *Die Aktion* 5, nos 22/23 (1915), cols 284–85, 287. In this column Pfemfert employs a subversive strategy to circumvent the strict censure that obtained from 1914 onwards: he exposes the madness of his time by allowing texts which had already been approved and published elsewhere to unmask one another reciprocally.

to death rituals. He employs this technique in his collection of prose poems *Eldtema* ('The Theme of Fire', 1939a),[22] following the model of T. S. Eliot's 'mythic method' by observing contemporary culture through the archaic filter of myth.[23] The concept of an apocalypse as it appears in this volume is equivocal, to say the least. The collection opens with a strophic poem that precedes the motto of the volume and is dated August 1938. It evokes a threat of apocalyptic dimensions: with rising and falling floods, fire and trembling trees it comes over an idyllic coastal landscape and is reminiscent of the description of the onset of Ragnarök in the eddic poems (cf. *Völuspá* 47 and 57, *Gylfaginning* ch. 51 (*SnE* 2005: 49–50); *Vafþrúðnismál* 48–50, *Hyndluljóð* 42). Like *Völuspá* 59 the final stanza of the Swedish poem describes how a renewed creation follows upon the destruction by fire and water. But whereas the Völva in *Völuspá* observes *upp koma* | *ǫðro sinni* | *iǫrð ór ægi* | *iðiagrœna* (*Völuspá* 59; 'coming up | a second time | earth from the sea, | green anew'), it describes the rebirth of the human race in the form of 'naked mothers' in a mode of expression that smacks of vitalism:

Må då eld och vatten uppflamma,	(Fire and water may flame up,
skapelsen renas	but creation is purified
och nakna mödrar åter uppstiga ur havet	and naked mothers rise up again from the sea
för att reda födsloläger i solens vita halm!	to prepare childbeds in the sun's white spires!)

(Lundkvist 1939a: 9)

A series of sections in lyrical prose follows upon the opening poem; they are preceded by the stanza *Hávamál* 138 in the wording of the Swedish translation of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.[24] The first three prose sections (pp. 11–18) of *Eldtema* describe, as Arnald explains, the descent into a remote *Urzeit* (primeval time) that is dominated by myths and rituals of a Frazerian type (Arnald 1995: 60–81). Frazer's influence is also the reason behind the choice of the two Norse myths that are parallelized with one another — they are the ones that

[22] On the question of what the genre of *Eldtema* is, cf. Arnald (1995). On Frazer's influence, cf. pp. 37, 53, 60–88.

[23] Lundkvist discusses T. S. Eliot's work at length in his essay 'Poesiens purgatorium', originally published in 1939 (Lundkvist 1939b: 24–45).

[24] Cf. Frazer (1925: 421); the quotation from *Hávamál* seems to make use of P. Aug. Gödecke's translation of the Edda (1877), from which it however clearly differs orthographically and verbally.

Frazer deals with in depth in *The Golden Bough*: Odin's sacrifice of himself to himself and Balder's death. Both are paraphrased in the second prose section of *Eldtema* in connection with the signs that presage Ragnarök:

> En man hängde i trädet medan solen gick ner och upp; återfödd steg han fram för att härska, själv given sig själv. [...]
>
> Nu skälver ekarna: världsåskan går, med dundrande vagnar kring horisonterna. Högst i kronan lyser en enda liten gren som eld! En invigd, en osårbar måste den vara som kliver upp i trädet för att avskära den. Akta er: den flammar av dödlig makt! Men i detta vimmel förvändes allt; den blinda skjuter på den gode, själv ovetande, en irrande skugga. Vem är det som skrattar vid blixtnedslaget! Den väldiga eken splittras och störtar, ett träd av eld! Vem kunde väl tro att den späda telningen skulle vara dödande? Och vem var det som skrattade?
>
> Sjöarna slocknar; blommorna sotas. O bedrövelse! Genom vilken springa stacks kniven in? Genom vilket nyckelhål flög ögats onda pil? Under vilken tröskel krälade ormen in? Men en enda liten gren lyser ännu som eld. Plötsliga flammor fallar ur rymden; träden klyvs sällsamt som av vilddjurständer.
>
> (Lundkvist 1939a, 14–15)

> (A man hung in the tree while the sun went down and came up; reborn he went forth to rule, himself given to himself. [...]
>
> Now the oaks tremble: the cosmic thunderstorm goes with thundering wagons around the horizons. Highest up in its crown a single little twig shines like fire! It would have to be an initiated, an invulnerable one who climbs up in the tree to cut it off. Take care: It flames with deadly might! But in that confusion everything is turned upside down; the blind man shoots at the good one, unaware himself, a wandering shadow. Who is that who laughs at the bolt of lightning! The mighty oak is split and falls, a tree of fire! Who could ever believe that the tender shoot could be deadly? And who was that who laughed?
>
> Lakes are extinguished; flowers become sooty. Oh, sorrow! Through which chink was the knife stuck in? Through which keyhole did the eye's evil arrow fly? Under which doorway did the snake crawl in? But a single little twig still shines like fire. Sudden flames fall from space; the tree is cloven strangely as if by the teeth of wild animals.)

No name explicitly indicates any reference to Norse myth; only a person who is at least somewhat familiar with the subject matter will recognize the little shining twig as a sprig of mistletoe, the invulnerable figure as Baldr and the blind figure as Höðr. The cosmic thunderstorm roams about like Thor in a wagon and hurls thunderbolts, the mighty tree trembles and falls like Yggdrasill — the description unmistakably owes much to Frazer's resumé of the myth of 'Balder and the Mistletoe' (Frazer 1922: 658–67), including the identification of the

tree as an oak, and by the same token makes references to further parallels: on the basis of material drawn for comparison from all points of the compass Frazer sets forth the theory that the personification of an oak-tree in which mistletoe grows guarantees the well-being of a community but that it is felled at last by a thunderstorm and is then reborn. He applies this idea inter alia to Jupiter and Nemi and Diana (Frazer 1922: 701–11). By leaving the identification of the myths aside and modelling *Eldtema* upon *The Golden Bough*, Lundkvist intensifies the apocalyptic imagery and makes it universal to an even greater degree (for a thorough discussion of the references to myth in this section of *Eldtema*, cf. Arnald 1995: 75–81). The use of Ragnarök motifs makes war appear to be a kind of cosmic natural catastrophe in the face of which the individual human being is completely powerless. The final exhortation in Gunnar Ekelöf's (1907–68) poem *Höstsejd* ('Autumn Magic', in the volume *Dedikation*, 1934), which follows upon an apocalyptic and surrealistic horror scenario, expresses the same standpoint (Ekelöf 1934: 19): *Var stilla, var tyst och vänta,* | *Andlöst tills gryningen öppnar sitt öga och andlöst tills skymningen sluter sin blick* ('Be still, be silent and wait, | breathless until dawn opens its eye and breathless until twilight closes its gaze'). The exhortation *Var stilla, var tyst och vänta* repeats the first line of the poem. In combination with the title 'Höstsejd' — the magical technique *seiðr* is associated with the figure of the Völva, the oracular speaker of Norse prophecy — this exhortation is reminiscent of the words the Völva addresses to her audience in *Völuspá* 1: *Hljóðs bið ek allar helgar kindir* ('Hearing I ask from all sacred families'). She too calls for silence before she gives an account of Ragnarök — in this case, however, at the end of her vision.[25] Whether the final sentence from Ekelöf's poem quoted above expresses hope or rather a disillusioned view of 'dawn' and 'twilight' is open to question — like the conclusion of *Völuspá*, where the final image is the appearance of a corpse-eating dragon flying. Anders Österling's (1884–1981) poem *Rötmånad* ('The Dog-Day Month' [the Swedish word *röt* means 'rot'], published in 1940 in the collection *Livets värde* ('The Value of Life')), more clearly expresses the confidence that the perpetually self-renewing life-force creates a new future after the poison-spewing Midgard serpent has annihilated a putrid and guilt-burdened present (Österling 1940: 32–37). Bo Bergman (1869–1967) encapsulates the period of the Second World War in the image of Balder's death as a time of change of indeterminable length, when one must endure the rule of injustice until the world is delivered ('Balder', Bergman 1944: 19).

[25] For a thorough analysis of the connections between 'Höstsejd' and *Vǫluspá*, cf. Lönnroth (1996).

In addition to the Ragnarök complex the myth of the Wild Hunt is quite popular in Scandinavia in connection with the Second World War. It appears to have been particularly apt as an image to express the ghostlike character of the German occupation. Johannes Jørgensen's (1866–1956) short poem *Den længste nat* ('The Longest Night'), published in the collection *Digte i Danmark* ('Poetry in Denmark', 1944: 24–25), can serve as an example:

Den længste Nat	(**The Longest Night**
Jeg ligger vaagen og lytter til mit Hjærtes Slag; endnu er der mange Timer, før det bliver Dag.	I lie awake and listen to my own heart-beat; there are still many hours until day comes.
Der bruser en Storm derude i Parkens Træer; der rider derude i Stormen en Spøgelseshær.	Out there a storm is raging in the trees of the park; out there in the storm an army of ghosts is riding.
Der bruser en Storm derude, og Natten er sort; der rider en Dødningeskare mod Valhals Port.	Out there a storm is raging, and the night is black. a host of dead men is riding to Valhall's gate.
Jeg ligger og lytter i Natten til mit Hjertes Slag, og Stormen bruser derude. Naar bliver det Dag?	I lie awake and listen to my own heart-beat, and the storm is raging out there. When will day come?)
December 1942	December 1942

Olav H. Hauge's ekphrastic poem *Odin kjem til Rådhuset* ('Odin Comes to the Town Hall', published in *Janglestrå* ('Gleanings/Wisps of Straw', 1980), written under the influence of the Cold War, employs the image of the Wild Hunt — eerily rampaging over the heads of men — as a symbol for higher powers which are unpredictable and not to be influenced (Hauge 2010: 339–40; cf. Karlsen 2003: 86–91).

On Technology's Treadmill — *Grottasöngr*

The myth of the wishing-mill Grotti and the exploitation of the giantesses Fenja and Menja by the Danish king Fróði, who allows them no rest from toil at the mill (transmitted in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 43 in *SnE* 1998: I, 51–57), enjoys striking popularity in the modern age. The giantesses remember their descent

from powerful giants and their former martial exploits, and then no longer grind out peace and prosperity for Fróði but rather war and destruction (for a thorough treatment of adaptations of *Grottasöngr*, cf. Zernack forthcoming). The first modern reworking that focussed on the social aspect of the poem was Viktor Rydberg's (1828–95) *Den nya Grottesången* ('The New Song of Grotti', Rydberg 1996: 151-85), published in 1891, which set the direction for further adaptations.[26] Unlike the medieval prototype, this poem of protest against the exploitation of human labour by industrial capitalism does not end with the death and destruction which the miller's assistants bring down upon to the exploiter (although the idea of revolution is present as well, given the association with the eddic text), but rather in a dystopian manner with the death of a slave who appeals to God and is trampled to death in the mill. Rydberg's nevertheless idealistic long poem is modern not only in its theme but also in its heterogeneous text form, which shifts between prose and verse sections of varying length and thus breaks with the existing system of aesthetic norms.[27] In Rydberg's poem the mill is the place in which the workers labour and, transposed to the level of society, a symbol of the exploitation and alienation from work within the framework of the capitalist system. In the medieval poem only the first level is visible (the mill as a place of labour); in his *Undersökningar i germanisk mythologi* ('Investigations into Germanic Mythology', 1886: 1, 425–51), however, Rydberg views the mill as a universal, that is, a cosmic phenomenon. Rydberg's socially relevant adaptation of *Grottasöngr* led to a great number of reworkings of the motif in the poetry of the workers' movement, for example, in *Två sånger i kvarnen* in *Ur djupet* ('Out of the Depths', 1906) by the Swede Leon Larsson (1883–1922) or in *Arbeider til Arbeider* ('From Worker to Worker', in *Hverdagen* ('Daily Life'), 1929) by the Norwegian poet Rudolf Nilsen (1901–29).

Johannes V. Jensen made use of the motif of Grotti several times in his work. In the penultimate chapter of *Vinteren* ('The Winter', 1901; cf. Jensen 1922: 222–23) the third and last part of his novel *Kongens Fald* ('The Downfall of the King'), the myth of the mill of fate is projected into the head of the protagonist Mikkel Thøgersen. The section of the chapter in question bursts

[26] Like Rydberg's poem, the poem *Grotta-söngur* (1891) by Stephan G. Stephansson (1853–1927), an Icelandic emigrant to America, combines the image of the wishing-mill with labour revolts against the ruling class (Stephan G. Stephansson [1909]: 106–07).

[27] Cf. Granlid (1973: 126–44); unlike many scholars, Granlid not only discusses the content of the poem but also presents an extensive analysis that includes the aesthetic aspects of the text.

the confines of genre by combining prose, lyrical and dramatic elements. As in Rydberg's view, micro-perspective and macro-perspective overlap: as the narrator of this section explains, Mikkel's head becomes the centre of the 'ground-out fate' that Fenja and Menja invoke in their antiphonal song of creation and destruction. Fenja sings of regularly self-renewing fertility — sunrise, spring, cattle and fertile fields — Menja of destructive influences such as storms and sickness. The description of a continuous alternation of weal and woe encapsulates the helplessness of man in the face of this continuous rise and fall in a concise image and forms a kind of minimal summary of the novel's plot as a whole. Jensen includes the just under two-pages-long chapter of his novel nearly unchanged in his collection *Digte 1906* ('Poems 1906'), where the typography characterizes it as free verse (cf. Jensen 2006: 17–18). The Grotti-motif is not only mythic with regard to its roots in Norse myth: the mill combines the notion of a cyclical structure (the eternal up-and-down) with the idea of a product or goal (final destruction) which is 'ground out'. In the serial novel *Hjulet* ('The Wheel', 1905), by contrast, the mill wheel is only one of a whole series of wheels that represent all aspects of progress and modernization, with conflicting positive and negative connotations, as in the medieval *Grottasöngr*. On the one hand, Grotti is a 'wheel of freedom' for the liberating internationalism and productivity of the New World (*Frihedens Hjul*, Jensen 1905: 59); on the other, the villain Evanston also illustrates his efforts to use the religious zeal of the numerous church-goers to his own financial advantage with a reference to *Grottasöngr* (Jensen 1905: 109): *kender De det gamle nordiske Kvad om Jættekvinderne, der maler for Kong Frode? – Et mærkeligt Urdigt, som De burde læse – vi er Grotte … nej, jeg mener, vi er Kong Frode, jeg mener, vi holder Posen under – denne Vej med Melet* ('Do you know the old Norse poem about the giantesses who grind corn for King Fróði? — A strange *ur*-poem, that you should read — we are Grotti […] no, I think we are King Fróði, I think we hold out the bag — this way with the meal!').

Olav H. Hauge's poem *Grottesongen* ('The Song of Grotti', 1946; in the collection *Glør i oska* ('Ember in the Ashes'; Hauge 2010: 75–77) again focuses on the societal aspect of the Grotti-myth. The poem is regular in structure and consists of eight stanzas of eight lines with four lifts each, a rhyme scheme *ababcdcd* and alternation between feminine and masculine cadences. The rhythm is dominated by dactyls that in combination with several enjambments give the style a waltz-like swinging flow that evokes the turning motion of the mill-wheel. The eight-line stanza is reminiscent of the Old Norse metre *fornyrðislag*; the occasional usage of alliteration and verbal echoes of the Old Norse *Grottasöngr* underscore this similarity. Thus the following passage about Frode

from the third stanza is taken almost word-for-word from *Grottasõngr* 5/5–6: *på gull han sat og i dunseng sov* ('on gold he sat and in a feather bed he slept'). In content Hauge's 'Grottesongen' is a continuation of the Old Norse pre-text: the subject of the first three stanzas is the 'original' mill Grotti, which grinds out happiness — an abundance of gold! — for the greedy king Frode. The fourth stanza marks a radical change: it describes the ineluctable destruction of Grotti and its renewed use by the reigning powers (*ætti til Frode*, 'Fróði's dynasty'), who do not want to do without the prosperity the mill produces and want to have labour in the mill continue down to the present day under the same miserable conditions:

Det gjekk som det måtte og stødt skal gjera,
Grotte vart grytt i havet og sokk.
Saknet av henne var tungt å bera,
og ætti til Frode hugsa ho nok, –
fekk ho på plass att! Atter lekkja
dei trælar til kverni,
og plikti vart hard.
Kongar gjekk fram og kvarv atti rekkja,
træl fylgde træl, son etter far.

(It went as it had to and ever again will,
Grotti was cast into the sea and sank.
Her loss was hard to bear,
and Froði's dynasty still remembered her, –
put her back in place! Once again they tie
the slaves to the millstone,
and the service grew hard.
The kings came forth and left the lineage,
slave followed slave, son after father.)

The next three stanzas describe the effects of the mill in the present day: by means of the increasingly arduous labour of the mill-slaves, it secures a life in affluence for the haves; only occasionally is the raucous sound of the grinding Grotti heard and disturbs the carefree and happy life of the proprietors. The beginning of Hauge's sixth stanza alludes to Rydberg's *Den nya Grottesången* with the words: *Sterkare no enn fyrste gongen, | hamrar kling og sirenor skjer, | vert til den nye Grottesongen, | skaparen av vår unders verd* ('Stronger now than the first time, | the hammers ring out and the sirens scream, | become the new Song of Grotti, | the producer of our marvellous world'). The second part of the poem depicts modern technology in mythic-fairy-tale-like images: *syn kjem trådlaust og tankar gjeng, | vogner glid som for galdrebøner, | og gogner lettar som ørnar veng* ('Pictures come wireless and thoughts move, | wagons glide as if by the agency of magic spells | and machines rise up as on the pinions of an eagle'). The final stanza warns of a renewed destruction of the wishing-mill. While the first loss of the mill is described in quite vague terms — the mill sinks into the sea — this time the technical wonders produced by the mill will destroy both the mill and the kingdom for good:

Og det som hende — eg spår de kjenner
til kor det gjekk — kan henda enn,
at harde hjelmar og kjempehender
rusar ut or vår ynskjekvern.
Stokkar knakar, og jarn i gjenge
skal skjelva hardt under jøtulmakt,
og kvarnastillet skal stå i rengje
til Frodes rike er øydelagt.

(And what happened — I predict they know
about how that went — can happen again,
that hard helmets and warrior hands
storm out of our wishing mill.
Shafts crack, and iron in movement
will tremble violently from the exertions of giants,
and the mill-frame will stand crooked
until Fróði's kingdom is destroyed.)

Since it was published immediately after the Second World War, it appears likely that the phrase 'hard helmets and warrior hands' (a verbal echo of *Grottasöngr* 18, *Hendr skolo hǫndla harðar triónor*, 'hands shall handle hard staves') alludes to the ambiguous blessings of technical progress — and to the irrationality of those who can fulfil 'wishes' at will. The explicit reference to a repetition — 'And what happened [...] can happen again' — emphasizes the character of myth as a model event — repetitive structure suggests the universality of myth.

It appears that two particular aspects of the Grotti-myth made it suitable for reuse in the twentieth century: on the level of content the societal aspect that inheres in the notion of the unjust exploitation of labourers; and on the structural level the cyclical movement that is semantically inherent in the image of a mill-wheel, a structure which Johannes V. Jensen and Olav H. Hauge transposed onto the structure of the plot. Thus the poems of the Dane and the Norwegian are characterized by a mythical structure to a higher degree than the medieval *Grottasöngr* is — its purposeful action has a beginning and an end.

Women's Voice

A fairly recent example of the reworking of Norse myths to criticize the order of society from a feminist standpoint was mentioned above, Svava Jakobsdóttir's *Gunnlaðar saga*. This novel depicts masculine and patriarchal modes of behaviour as the cause of the most pressing problems of the twentieth century: war and the destruction of the environment.[28] Most texts which focus on the concerns of the gender debate stem from the period after the Second World War, but there are some earlier examples, such as Karin Boye's (1900–41) poem *Sköldmön* ('Shield-Maid') in the collection *Gömda land* ('The Hidden Land', 1924: 65-66), a compact poem with a highly condensed structure characterized by parallelism and repetition — nine of the sixteen lines begin with the

[28] For the identification of the feminine voice in the eddic tradition and its use in Svava's *Gunnlaðar saga*, see Thomas (1988).

words *Jag drömde om [...]* ('I dreamed of [...]'); this gives the poem a monotonous tone like that of a magic invocation.[29] The theme resembles that of a dream more than that of myth, but the title alludes to the world of Norse myth, in which *skjaldmeyjar* ('shield-maidens') support the hero in battle by fighting at his side (in the *fornaldarsögur* or in the Helgi-poems). In the second stanza bolts of lightning fall from the hand of a figure addressed as 'you' and fell trolls. The allusion to the world of Norse myth in the poem's title makes it natural to associate the figure addressed as 'you' in the second stanza with Thor. Predominantly by means of its form the poem evokes the severe image of an Amazon, but this martial simplicity is countered by the mention of roses in addition to fire, fighting and death. The relationship between the martial character of the shield-maiden and the evidently masculine 'you' is strangely ambivalent: the latter does not even notice that the shield-maiden falls in battle at his side. The first person speaker, however, does not regard her death as meaningless, but rather as *fager och god* ('beautiful and good'). Evidently her ideal is total commitment — to the battle for a common higher goal (of a group: cf. *Vår skara* ('Our troop') in the second stanza) — even at the price of self-extinction.

The examination of the gender roles and the relationship between the sexes has increasingly led to the search for female voices in medieval literature. The central text in this context is *Völuspá* with its female speaker the Völva, who gives Odin information about the fate of the world. It therefore comes as no surprise that a great deal of literary use has been made of this text. It has often been regarded as a venerable or even sacred text and hence has been translated, retold, commented upon or paraphrased more often than any other eddic poem. In *Hun. Dikt over Voluspå* ('She. Poems about *Völuspá*', 1989), Erling Kittelsen (1946–), a poet who wrote a thesis on Old Norse cosmogony, approaches *Völuspá* experimentally from several angles. The book (which is not paginated) gives the text of *Völuspá* in its entirety: first a Norwegian translation of each stanza, followed by the Old Norse text of the stanza with explanatory notes in the manner of a commentary at the bottom of the page. The next (recto) page presents the most original component of *Hun*: free and associative verses about the stanza, reflections on contemporary matters on the part of a

[29] This poem thus conforms to Lagerkvist's ideal of the 'purest art', which is characterized by *ytterligt enkelt byggda språk, med ideliga uppredningar*[*sic*] *i varierad form av samma tanke, vilka upprepningar förtäta stämningen tills man känner som skulle man kvävas* ('extremely simple style of language with constant repetitions of the same idea in varied form, repetitions which condense the atmosphere until one feels as though one is being suffocated') (Lagerkvist 1913: 54).

feminine voice that to a greater or lesser degree relate to the Old Norse pre-text, *Völuspá*. In his afterword Kittelsen calls these *med-diktning* ('accompanying poetry'). The book is conceived as a self-referential dialogue between the Old Norse stanzas and the 'accompanying poetry'. The typography used underscores this. Kittelsen makes use of the dichotomy between 'Us/We' and 'the Others' inherent in the eddic poem. In the 'accompanying poetry' he places the speaker outside the 'Us' group, and this corresponds to the association between the Völva and the giants in the Old Norse poem. In the 'accompanying poetry' the element of the 'Other' has a feminine identity and speaks with the voice of a prostitute, a sick woman or one who is autonomous and critical of capitalism. In 1994 Suzanne Brøgger (1944–) published a Danish adaptation of *Völuspá*, *Vølvens spådom*. She explains the guiding principles behind it in her Forward. These clearly situate her work in the body-focusing modernist (*kropsmodernistisk*) current of the late twentieth century: she mentions keywords such as 'initiation journey', feminine mysteries, oppression by the patriarchal system and the exploration of the feminine unconscious. Brøgger alters the text in some ways, in part to increase its intelligibility to the general public, but also in order to present it as a feminine initiation journey (cf. Brøgger 2002: 7–17).

Self-Reflexive Myths

Two myths lend themselves as vehicles for literary treatment of the relationship between literature and reality or the question of how literature comes into being: the myths about the mead of poetry (transmitted in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G57-58; *SnE* 1998: 1, 3–5) and of Odin's sacrifice of himself to himself and his acquisition of runic knowledge (*Hávamál* 138–41). The acquisition of mythic knowledge is also the subject of the myth of Odin's drink from Mímir's well, for which he must pledge his eye — at least as Snorri interprets it.[30] The figure of the Völva is often used as the herald of a higher, more complete knowledge which she imparts to Odin or another questioner. In modern literature mythologems which are not connected with one another in the medieval tradition are combined, for example, Odin's self-sacrifice and the Völva's prophecy of Ragnarök.

In the last section of the first book of *Orm og Tyr* Martin A. Hansen makes use of Norse myths of the acquisition of knowledge and the art of poetry in order to explore the problematic mode of existence of poets. He calls the *Hávamál* stanzas about Odin's self-sacrifice *Eddaens mærkeligste myte om*

[30] Cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 (*SnE* 2005: 17). The corresponding stanzas in *Völuspá* (sts 27–28) do not indicate the reason for the pledge.

guden [*Odin*] ('the Edda's strangest myth about the god [Odin]') — whom he regards more as a creature sprung from the minds of poets than as a god people believed in — and *en spejling af skjaldens mystiske erfaring* ('a reflection of the mystic experience of a poet', Hansen 1952: 181). Hansen combines this myth with that of the theft of the mead of poetry from Gunnlöð to produce an equivocal image of the god: Odin acquires all knowledge by means of guile, deceit or violence. He neither possesses his own source for the mead of poetry nor owns Mímir's well of wisdom, and in order to learn what the future holds he must consult a Völva. *Völuspá* demonstrates this clearly; its vision of Ragnarök is the expression of the fear Odin has of the future because his knowledge of it is so limited. In Hansen's eyes Odin represents purely intellectual, reflecting and reasoning cognition. He gains access to another important source of knowledge, inspiration and mystic vision, only through the mediation of others. The parallel between the mythic poet-god and Hansen's own image of himself as a doubt-racked poet shortly after the Second World War is expressed very clearly in his view of the image of the gods which *Völuspá* presents: it is the result of a *voldsom krise* ('a violent crisis', Hansen 1952: 190), of a drama, and rises up out of deepest despair to a cautiously hopeful new beginning.[31] Earlier, Karin Boye's poem *Asar och Alfer* ('Æsir and Elves', 1924, in *Gömda Land*, 54–62) makes such a distinction between two different kinds of knowledge. There as well — in the second section entitled *Alfen Dag sjunger om Oden* ('The Elf Dagr Sings of Odin', 58–60) Odin's self-sacrifice on the Ash Yggdrasill is conflated with the pledge of his eye as the price for access to Mímir's well — with the result that this pledge magnifies Odin's sacrifice. The elf Dag, who witnesses Odin's sacrifice of himself to himself, falls prey to the power of suggestion exerted by Odin's strong will; from then on he thinks little of his own knowledge.

Litet vet jag om visdomsbrunnen,	(Little do I know of wisdom's well,
längtade aldrig dit.	never yearned to be there.
Dess glans är svart. Jag vet en källa,	Its lustre is black. I know a spring,
glimmande silvervit:	gleaming silver-white:
djupt, djupt vid livets rötter	deep, deep near life's roots
sköljer en våg mitt sinne.	a wave washes my mind.
Ingen krävde mitt öga som pant.	No one demanded my eye as a pledge.
Jag dricker fritt där inne.	I drink freely in there.
Som en ström	Like a stream

[31] On this aspect of Martin A. Hansen's *Orm og Tyr* cf. Bjørnvig (1955: 180–82); Præstgaard Andersen (2007); Lundgreen-Nielsen (2008: 90–91).

flyter min dag — som hade jag aldrig sport
det främmande svar, jag hör var natt
i min dröm:
'Jag själv har gjort det.'
(Boye 1924: 58–59)

flows my day — as though I had never heard
the strange answer I hear each night
in my dreams:
'I myself have done it.')
(Boye 1994: 81–82)

This section of the poem contrasts two sources of knowledge: conscious knowledge that is won by means of tremendous exertion and tremendous suffering, and unconscious knowledge, which flows effortlessly. Whether the latter is to be regarded as inferior, as it seems to Dag, is a question that remains unanswered. It seems plausible that the contrast between these two kinds of knowledge is a reflex of psychoanalytic theories that were a subject of intense discussion in student circles in the 1920s and '30s (Hammerström 2001: 65, 86).

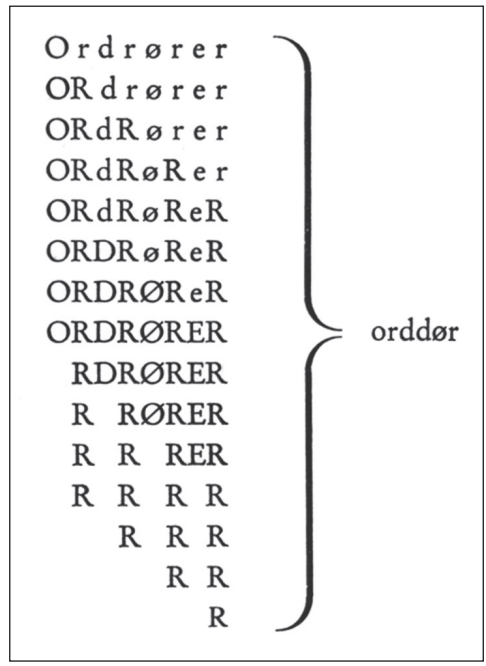
Hansen and Boye make use of mythic motifs at fairly great length. But often only a passing allusion is made to the myths of poetry and knowledge in order to provide the narrative instance with a certain connotation — whether it be that of a privileged source of knowledge or, on the contrary, to point up the problematic character of the poetic voice. Artur Lundkvist's use of *Hávamál* 138 as the motto for his prose poems in *Eldtema* and his two citations of the formula *själv given mig/sig själv* ('myself given to myself/to one's self') has already been mentioned above. In a syncretistic manner typical of many modernist works Lundkvist combines this Norse myth of the self-sacrifice of the speaking poet with an invocation of the Heimarmene, the power of fate of the Stoics whose decrees only the seer can read in the stars, and thereby marks his poem as a divinely prophetic text (Lundkvist 1939a: 10–14; on the functions of the motto and the invocation of the Heimarmene, cf. Arnald 1995: 52–62). Even more cursory is Erik Lindegren's (1910–68) allusion to the motif of the pledged eye in the third of his forty 'exploded sonnets' of *mannen utan väg* ('the man without a way'; Lindegren 2010: 7–48) — this is one of the few myths from Norse mythology used by Lindegren in addition to a great many from classical mythology. The text ends with the words *ur enögda brunnen vevades frågor och sång* ('from the one-eyed well questions and songs were woven'). It follows upon a series of rhetorical questions (Lindegren 2010: 11): *vem vädjar väl längre till vandrarn med hjulet i handen* ('who sets on a wanderer any longer with a wheel in his hand'), *vem tror han på en gång kan leva och dö* ('who does he believe can live and die at the same time') and lends emphasis to the lack of orientation in an environment characterized by chaos and suffering.[32] Outside

[32] In the first section of *Kvartett* ('Quartet', 1942) as well the sacrificed eye does not lead

Scandinavia the German writer Elisabeth Langgässer (1899–1950) uses a brief allusion to the Norse myth of poetry to mark the status of a speaker as privileged. Langgässer was an exponent of a modern Catholic *weltanschauungs*-literature whose novel *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* ('The Indelible Seal', 1947) has been pointed out as a work that brought German narrative literature up to an epic level of modernism again. In her last novel, *Märkische Argonautenfahrt* ('Voyage of the Argonauts in the March Brandenburg', published posthumously in 1950), she lists everything that has shaped Western civilization and concludes with the words (Langgässer 1959: 273): *Rätsel am Anfang, Rätsel am Ende. Rätsel der Sphinx vor dem Eingang von Theben — und am Ende neun Tage im windigen Baum: 'Ich selbst, mir selbst.' Weltende. Untergang. 'Manches verkünde ich, mehr noch weiß ich. Wollt ihr noch mehr?'* ('Riddles at the beginning, riddles at the end. The riddle of the Sphinx at the gate of Thebes — and at the end nine days on the windy tree: "I myself, to myself." End of the world, downfall. "I reveal many things, I know still more. Do you want more?"'). In this passage an allusion to Odin's self-sacrifice is coupled with a further citation from the Poetic Edda: the refrain from *Völuspá* with which the Völva points forward to her vision of Ragnarök. In this way the knowledge referred to becomes knowledge about eschatological matters. In this novel with its experimental narrative form Langgässer combines reality and the Christian doctrine of salvation, the present and the mythic with one another and presents a further example of the syncretistic use of myth typical of modernism, in which, however, Norse myth plays a very marginal role.

The myth of Odin's self-sacrifice focuses on the poet and the painful process of creativity. Adaptations of the myth of the mead of poetry by contrast shift attention to the nature of poetic inspiration or to the donor of the mead, the giantess Gunnlöð. This too can become an expression of the painful experience of the poet: for example, in the poem *Eg ligg her i mi eiga stormtyngd bunden* ('I lie here bound in my own weight of storm', in *Ved vebande* ('By the Sacred Bands', 1923: 42–43) by the Norwegian Olav Nygard (1884–1924). Here Suttung's mead rages like a whirlwind in the heart of the poet: *Men suttungsmjøden slær meg gruvom, tunnar | som kvervelvindar med min beste draum | til skaparmagtenn* [*sic*] *rister alle grunnar | og verda styn i flodbrot, himelflaum* ('But Suttung's mead fells me to the ground, | like whirlwinds spins my best dreams like tops, | until the creative power makes the entire ground quake | and

to the attainment of clear knowledge: *ögat som offrats i källan | ångrar sitt offer nu* ('the eye that was sacrificed in the well | now regrets its sacrifice' (Lindegren 1942: 28).



the world groans in the flood, the inundation from heaven'). Svava Jakobsdóttir's (1930–2004) novel *Gunnlaðar saga* (1987) has already been mentioned several times above. By means of the theft of the precious bowl in which the mead is served Odin gains dominance over the way history is interpreted and becomes the first falsifier in history, in that he depicts Gunnlöð in the eyes of posterity as a foolish nymphomaniac daughter of a giant and passes over in silence her central role in a cultic ritual essential to the fertility of the land. Andri Snær Magnason's (1973–) story *Gras* ('Grass', 1996) presents a postmodern reply to this novel. He humorously mirrors and distorts both the myth of the mead of poetry and Svava's feminist interpretation of it.

The influences that eventually lead to postmodernism cause another, 'deconstructive' aspect of the myth of the mead of poetry to gain popularity: the murder of Kvasir and the brewing of the mead of poetry from his blood. This is particularly clear in the collection *Show* (1966) by the Dane Per Højholt (1928–2004), who concludes a series of nonsense texts with the myth of Kvasir. The collection deconstructs the referentiality of language. Its final text complex is entitled *Rapport om R* ('Report about R'; Højholt 1966: 29–40) and initially awakens certain expectations in the reader by employing the textual organization and stylistic conventions current in descriptions of scientific experiments: *Det besluttes at udsende fire hold for at udforske R* ('Four teams are to be sent out to examine R'; what R is, remains uncertain) (Højholt 1966: 31). The last of the four 'reports' described is entitled 'platform IV: Kvaser' and is spoken by the dwarves Fjalar and Galar. They report about drinking *tør the brygget af dværge på en mand som steg op af et spytkar* ('a dry tea brewed by dwarves from a man who rose up out of a spittoon') (Højholt 1966: 38). The consumption of this beverage caused them to answer their own questions and to investigate *denne enklave* ('this enclave'). An absurd dialogue between the two dwarves ensues, in which each of them appears to focus exclusively upon himself, and

this is followed by an equally absurd dramatic scene. The concluding piece is a shape poem (Højholt 1966: 40; represented above). Its point of departure — it is unclear whether by intention or by a curious coincidence — is a typographical error in the edition of Vilhelm Grønbech's *Nordiske myter og sagn* ('Norse Myths and Legends') published in the series Gyldendals Uglebøger ('Gyldendal's Owl-Books') in 1964. Højholt cites the account of the mead of poetry episode given in this edition in his explanatory notes.[33] In Snorri's account in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G57 (*SnE* 1998: 1, 3) the name of the vessel containing the mead of poetry is given as *Óðre(y)rir* ('Poetry-Mixer/Stirrer'? 'Mind-Stirrer'?). When this vessel is mentioned by name for the first time, the text of the 1964 edition reads *ordrører* ('Word-Mixer/-Stirrer'). At the second mention the name is given as *odrører* (as is the case throughout in other editions of Grønbech's book). Højholt takes up this semantically productive typographical error and deconstructs it: the word is first subjected to several changes in accentuation, after which the vowels are progressively omitted. In the end all that remains of the (vessel for) the mead of poetry is the death rattle of an R — the R which *Rapport om R* was to investigate? The process is summarized and its result given as *orddør* ('word-dies'? or 'word-door'?). By his quotation of Grønbech's retelling of the myth of the mead of poetry, Højholt signals that the typographical error is not absurd and pure nonsense: in combination with the content of the verbal material used, the emphatic and summary-like position of the shape poem symbolizes the fragmentation and undermining of the poetic word.

IV.

The close link between Norse myths and nationalistic conceptions or discussions characteristic of nineteenth century reception is absent from modern — or, at least, from modernist — literature. One of the reasons is to be found in the influence of a major theoretical concept of modern times: the psychoanalytic method, which shifts the interpretation of myth from the societal sphere to the psyche of the individual person. The personification of the conscious and the unconscious in Boye's poem *Asar och alfer* or in Hansen's *Orm og Tyr* was mentioned above. Villy Sørensen (1983) states explicitly that he wrote *Ragnarok* (1982) with a psychoanalytic interpretation in mind (cf. Lundgreen-Nielsen

[33] Højholt (1966: 45). Torben Brostrøm (1975: 66) recognized that the word in question is a misprint.

2008: 95). C. G. Jung's (1875–1961) theory of the collective unconscious of a people or tribe exerted an equally strong influence on the literary use of Norse myths in Scandinavia: the myths of such groups are believed to express their unconscious in archetypal images, and literary texts can make these images accessible to the reader. Despite their rejection of exaggerated nationalism the Dane Martin A. Hansen and the Norwegian poet Olav H. Hauge, for example, employ this idea in order to ascertain their own origins and to avoid alienation from the essential roots of existence in times of increasing globalization.[34] New or modern is the fact that the character of 'native' myths is not seen as something which separates 'us' from 'the others' — in contrast to the usual nationalistic use of such myths. At the very latest, awareness of the atomic bomb leads to the realization that 'we' includes the whole world — Ragnarök strikes everyone (Villy Sørensen's novel *Ragnarok* expresses this in exemplary fashion).

That awareness of the possibility that the earth could be completely wiped out leads to a new popularity of mythology in poetry is something recognized by historians of religion as well as writers and poets. In his 1949 monograph *Le mythe de l'éternel retour : archétypes et repetition*, Mircea Eliade states (1949: 225) *que l'œuvre de deux des écrivains les plus significatifs de notre temps — T. S. Eliot et James Joyce — est traversée dans toute sa profondeur par la nostalgie du mythe de la répétition éternelle et, en fin de compte, de* ***l'abolition du temps*** ('that the work of two of the most significant writers of our day — T. S. Eliot and James Joyce — is saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and, in the last analysis, for *the abolition of time*'). He suspects that the underlying reason is the desire to set up the cyclical return of archetypes and mythic patterns as a bulwark against the *Terreur de l'histoire* ('terror of history'), in awareness of increasing existential insecurity. According to Eliade, the function of myth in the last analysis appears to be identical in literature and in religion.

[34] An idea that finds expression in Jung (1973 [1922]: 36–38).

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6.1.2 – Old Norse Myth and *Finnegans Wake*

Christopher Black

On page 424 of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*,[1] the reader is confronted with the following:

> Ullhodturdenweirmudgaardgringnirurdrmolnirfenrirlukkilokki-baugimandodrrerinsurtkrinmgernrackinarockar! Thor's for yo!
>
> -The hundredlettered name again, last word of perfect language
>
> (*FW* 424. 21–23).

The first word in this quotation is made up mostly from names derived from Old Norse myth. They are, in order: Ullr, Höðr, Eir, Miðgarðr, Gungnir, Urðr, Mjölnir, Fenrir, Loki, Baugi, Oddrún, Surtr and Ragnarök. The Danish word for 'man', *mand*, also appears to be included, a token of Joyce's lifelong interest in Scandinavian languages. 'Gringir', of course, is quite far from 'Gungnir', the name of Óðinn's spear, but Edmund L. Epstein has proposed that this 'may be a mistake on the part of Joyce or a typist', suggesting instead that it should be *gungnir*, making the word a hundred letters long (Epstein 2010: 297). This is quite possible, since the lengthy and intricate process of writing the *Wake* seems to have made some mistakes unavoidable. There are also nine other hundred-

[1] All citations from *Finnegans Wake* are from the Penguin edition (2000) and refer to page and line numbers. The first publication of the full text of *Finnegans Wake* (*FW*) was in 1939.

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letter words in the text, and Joyce makes reference to Óðinn's spear elsewhere in the *Wake* (*FW*: 221.09).

Joyce's final book is over six hundred pages long and is filled with avant-garde manipulations of natural languages like the example above. Behind this example alone there is a vast context: this is one of ten so-called 'thunderwords' in the *Wake*, Joyce's attempts to recreate the first words of human language according to the theory of Giambattista Vico. In his *Scienza Nuova* ('New Science', 1725), Vico argued that human languages started as imitations of thunder (Verene 2003: 9). In addition, Joyce is alluding to the fact that the name Þórr comes from the same root as many words for thunder in Indo-European languages, including the Danish *torden* (alluded to in the above in 'turden') and the Romanian *tunet*. The implication of this synthesis of Vico's system and historical-comparative linguistics is that Þórr's name belongs to the perfect language spoken before Babel.[2] Other parts of the *Wake* show a preoccupation with the nature of the pre-Babel language (e.g., *FW*: 313.32–314.09), a preoccupation which has gripped many European thinkers, as Umberto Eco has demonstrated (Eco 1995). Pre-Christian Scandinavian religion is intricately woven into much of the *Wake*, but can we move from some highly complicated, even chaotic examples to identify the abstract meaning of Joyce's use of this tradition?

The chances do not look good. Joyceans tend to express caution about unlocking the deep meaning of the *Wake*'s 'chaosmos' (*FW*: 118.21; Bishop 1986: 3–26; Senn 2007: 33). There seems to be a consensus that the *Wake* presents special problems for the reader. Fritz Senn has summarized the practical dilemma of the scholar trying to interpret something 'in' the text, whether it is psychoanalysis or Scandinavian religion: we can make countless interpretations, and the text is practically overflowing with figurative language to be unwound. But Senn questions who can 'verify or falsify' the kinds of propositions we typically find made about the *Wake* (Senn 2005: 197). We can, for example, make the relatively superficial observation that words resembling the name Baldr appear in the text. Examples include the portmanteau word 'baldowl' (*FW*: 074.16) and 'balder' (*FW*: 331.14). But the higher-order tasks usually expected of interpretation, such as describing *the* role of the Norse god in Joyce's book, seem to be more difficult than similar questions about other books. We are thwarted even on the lexical level, with individual words typi-

[2] On the significance of the concept of the biblical Tower of Babel for medieval theories of the origin of human languages and their application to Old Norse myths, see Chapter 2.1.2 in Volume 1 of this study.

cally supporting multiple, even contradictory interpretations. 'It is not,' as Senn puts it, 'that such statements lack validity [...]. It is the air of exclusiveness that puts them out of court' (Senn 2005: 198).

These issues have been a theme since some of the earliest writing on the *Wake*, such as that provided by Joyce's friends Eugène Jolas and Samuel Beckett (see Beckett et al. 1972). The consensus, it might seem, is that the *Wake* is a different kind of book, providing different kinds of problems for the scholar. At some points Joyce himself implies this idea, and he uses Norse myth, among other things, to do it. Learning to use the language of the *Wake* is compared with Óðinn's acquisition of the knowledge of runes. The book narrates its own composition, and the breakthrough moment comes relatively late on the night on which it is set. Throughout that night, Joyce tells the story of the growth and decline of a family according to the structure of a single night's sleep. Darkness coincides with the decline of the father, while his death proper comes at midnight. One of the most obvious features of the *Wake* is the use of other texts to tell its story — and for the death of the father Joyce uses the story of Ragnarök, with frequent references to its Wagnerian transformation. Joyce emphasizes what he sees as the fatalism of Norse myth by forecasting Ragnarök throughout the text, including at *FW*: 170.23–24. After the fall of the father, the *Wake* becomes the story of the rise of his son in the new morning spreading over Dublin.

Over the course of this night Joyce also tells the story of Dublin itself, from a pagan Scandinavian port to an outpost of Christendom. In the early Dublin morning, after the death of his Scandinavian father, the Irish son has a dream during which he hears a message. Joyce tells this part of the story using language associated with the Christian Gospels. The son declares that he has been called on to write and deliver a letter which will exonerate his father, though he implies that this letter has an extraordinary importance and will indicate something about the fundamental nature of the world (*FW*: 404.07–09). In order to write it, he needs to acquire a special (avant-garde, even?) language, and Joyce compares the acquisition of this language to Óðinn's acquisition of the knowledge of runes (*FW*: 479.34–35). This language is also referred to as the 'root language' (*FW*: 424.17), which may allude to Óðinn's knowledge of the roots of Yggdrasill, reinforcing the idea that this language mirrors to some extent the structure of the world. The idea that learning to read the avant-garde language of the *Wake* is comparable to acquiring the ability to read runes, and thus come to gain deep insights about the nature of things, is included in the first part of the *Wake*, which serves as a preview of the rest of the book: 'This ourth of years is not save brickdust and being humus the same roturns. He who runes may rede it on all fours' (*FW*: 018.04–06).

The son, however, suspects that writing the letter with this 'root language' will probably rouse up what he regards as the shameful, non-Celtic, non-Christian, Scandinavian past of his 'Norsker' father (*FW*: 480.01) and Dublin as a whole (*FW*: 480). This appears to be a development of an idea Joyce delivered to a Trieste audience in a lecture decades before writing the *Wake*. In that lecture, the writer argued that the notion of Celtic purity so central to Irish nationalism depended on the repression of the 'racial' influence of invading groups, including the Vikings (Joyce 2000b: 118–19).

This example shows that Joyce played with the idea that the *Wake* was written in a special language which, like other magical or sacred languages, cannot be interpreted by the usual means. It is an idea taken up by some of his readers. But how much do we expect to be able to apply falsification, as Popper (2002) articulated it, or any other principle of theory choice, to the interpretation of a sophisticated piece of imaginative writing? Despite Joyce's play with the idea, the overwhelming use of quotations from literary history suggests that the *Wake* is not an attempt to construct an alien language that breaks away from tradition, but is instead precisely about how people have used language, in particular as it is recorded in writing. The fact that the language acquired by the artist as a young man is the 'root language' implies that it is the first language, the essence of language. The suggestion that we are hearing the pre-Babel language implies something similar.

If the *Wake* is about the son finding the essence of language, what does he find? The son, who is another of Joyce's self-portraits, finds the essence of language to be a Heraclitan flux, an idea Otto Jespersen — with reference to the Greek — called 'the chief innovation' of linguistics in the nineteenth century (Jespersen 1922: 32). Joyce had read Jespersen, and Hugh Kenner described this idea as the major influence on Joyce's view of language (Kenner 1971a: 45–46). But one somewhat atypical aspect of the take on this major idea in the *Wake* is that the flow of language is not represented as linear but as cyclic. The stream of language moves forward according to a cyclic structure, by which the new speaker draws on the language he or she has inherited in order to make something new. Joyce seems to be captivated in the text by the fact that all creative work requires the use of the past in this way. Epstein has pointed out that Joyce used the river Liffey, which reverses its flow daily, as a natural image of the cycle of the *Wake* (Epstein 2010: 9–14). We can add that Joyce used the Dublin river in order to make a cyclic revision of Heraclitus's classic metaphor.

Joyce correlates this cycle with other natural cycles, including the turn of night and day and the succession of parents by children. Naturally, this puts the use of the past, including the use of the Old Norse past, in a central position

in the text. Quotation of Old Norse material is not quotation for the sake of appearing learned — Joyce is instead dramatizing the fact that, in his view, all creative use of language draws on the past. This notion of the past being stirred by new creative activity is part of the meaning of the title *Finnegans Wake*. Words, stories and characters recur again and again, transformed each time. Towards this view Joyce had a few strands of influence: the 'reprobate tradition' of Blake and Yeats was one (Cormack 2008), as were 'the enormous epic poems' of Irish tradition, as Jorge Luis Borges described them (2000: 97), 'which sang of the robbing of bulls which in another incarnation were heroes and in others fish and mountains'. But another significant influence was Norse myth. Somewhat like Mircea Eliade (1949) and Jens Peter Schjødt (1981) considerably later, Joyce saw Norse myth as conveying a cyclical conception of time, and may have arrived at this interpretation on his own.[3] The thunder-word quoted at the beginning of this essay is made of elements Joyce saw as essential stages of the cycle. The first and fourth books of the *Wake* are located by Joyce at Ginnungagap, which he seems to have interpreted to function like Vico's *ricorso*: a brief period of creation between the end of one cycle and the start of another (i.e., 'in the ginnandgo gap between antediluvious and annadominant'; *FW*: 014.16–17). Ragnarök is, as mentioned, foreshadowed throughout the *Wake* (e.g., in 'rending of the rocks'; *FW*: 170.24) or in the de-voweled Wagnerian translation 'gttrdmmrng' (*FW*: 258.02) but occurs in Book II, Chapter 3, with the death of the father of the *Wake*, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, also known as HCE. Joyce interprets elements of Norse myth as encoding an eternal, decidedly patrilineal family cycle, centring on the usurpation of father by son. He presents Baldr as the fated successor to Óðinn and implies that a symmetry holds between this relationship and that of the Christian Trinity, which he also depicts as a myth about the family cycle. Appropriately, at the death of HCE, Baldr is substituted into the Trinitarian formula: 'So in the names of the balder and of the sol and of the hollichrost' (*FW*: 331.14).

The idea that the *Wake* is about language and literary history is reflected in how Joyce created the book. *Finnegans Wake* was written over seventeen years, almost entirely in interwar Paris. It was serialized in a number of publications and published as a whole in 1939, two years before the author's death in Zürich. Much of the work of writing the *Wake* consisted in taking down words and phrases in a series of notebooks, most of which are preserved and are now studied by scholars (Rose 1995). Joyce could read Danish but was not able to

[3] But see Chapter 6.1.1 above for the popularity of this concept in the work of other modernist writers of the early twentieth century.

read Old Norse-Icelandic. Even after becoming nearly blind, he found ways to absorb — through strained reading or listening — a large number of books touching on pre-Christian Scandinavian religions. There is still some work that could be done by scholars who can use their familiarity with sources on pre-Christian Scandinavian religion in analysing Joyce's notebooks in order to discover what sources he used on this topic. I have discovered several sources, including one on the Finnish and Sámi religions, Arthur Reade's *Finland and the Finns* (1917), which Joyce made notes on in a notebook called VI.B.15.[4]

Despite the fact that Joyce took notes on sources about these traditions, the fundamental Scandinavian religion and myth of the *Wake* is drawn from the texts belonging to the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition. Readers have traditionally found this appropriate, since they have, like Padraic Colum in an early review, understood HCE to be 'Norse', on the basis of the fact that 'Dublin was founded by Vikings and Norse Merchants' (Colum 1970: 543). What this actually means, of course, is the issue. Most critics have assumed that HCE has some Viking heritage, dating to the Scandinavian era of Dublin history, an idea partially supported by the text. HCE is called 'Ostman Effendi' (*FW*: 131.07) and is described as having the 'oyne of an oustman in skull of skand' (*FW*: 310.30). But what relevance did Joyce think an ancestor or two forty generations back might have for a Dubliner in the first half of the twentieth century? This is not a question about the use of the textual past but of the ancestral past. I will conclude this brief overview by describing the close relationship between the textual and ancestral pasts in *Finnegans Wake*.

Harold Bloom has pointed out a symmetry in the heroes of Joyce's two great books, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*: 'Like Leopold Bloom, whose half-Jewishness makes him a stranger to his fellow Dubliners, the protagonist of the *Wake* is an outsider, a Protestant Scandinavian' (Bloom 2011: 113). David Hayman has noted a symmetry in the narratives of these two characters: just as Bloom is verbally abused in a Dublin pub for being Jewish in the 'Cyclops' episode of *Ulysses*, so HCE is abused in his pub, in part for being a Scandinavian outsider (Hayman 2007: 262). One thing Hayman's and Bloom's observations point towards is that in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce wanted to question the meaning of Scandinavian identity in modernity, just as he had done with Jewish identity in *Ulysses*. In both cases there are multiple definitions of this identity, most of which have a temporal basis. But in both cases modernity has problematized these definitions. According to some classifications, Bloom is a Jew, because his father Virag was one. But according to Jewish law, Bloom is not a Jew, since his

[4] See my University of Sydney PhD thesis (Black 2015).

mother was a gentile. Joyce's method is more subversive and tricky in *Finnegans Wake*, convincing enlightened, modern readers that HCE is a 'Scandinavian' or a 'Norseman', on little more than cliché and physical appearance, and the suggestion of a distant ancestry. On these grounds, readers take HCE to be something of an heir to pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. With these themes, Joyce's two major works mirror his age, in which, as Léon Poliakov has noted, the most 'important differentiation between the inhabitants of Europe' was between the so-called 'Aryans' and the so-called 'Semites' (Poliakov 1996: 1). As Len Platt has thoroughly demonstrated, however, Joyce undermines 'race' as a biological concept in *Finnegans Wake*, implying throughout the work that it is, in the literature he absorbed on the topic, primarily a linguistic construct (Platt 2007). Writings on race, a concept now accepted to have no foundation in molecular biology (Mallon 2006: 528–29), are treated by Joyce as literary self-descriptions. This is another way Joyce approached what Hugh Kenner has identified as his basic 'subject', that being 'the stories people tell themselves' (Kenner 1971b: 553). Stripped of its scientific status, racial writing provided another source for the notebooks. In the vision of the *Wake*, modern identity continues to have a temporal foundation but in linguistic, rather than biological history. The flow of language, it has already been noted, was regarded by Joyce as cyclic, advancing when each new speaker returns to the past in order to articulate something new. The fundamental meaning of the pre-Christian Scandinavian past in the *Wake*, then, is that in Joyce's view it was, and will continue to be, caught up in this great tradition, whereby the creative use of language hinges on the use of the past.

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6.2 – Old Norse Mythology in Anglophone Fantasy and Science Fiction from 1940

Randi Eldevik

The engine wobbled, jinked and turned a complete revolution around its central axis, but with no noticeable effect on its speed or trajectory. Frey, however, lost his left glove, ripped from his hand by the wind.

'I think we'll have to try an emergency landing,' Odin shouted. 'I'm going to look around for a suitable spot.'

'Great.' Thor tried to wriggle down further into his seat. 'We're in enough trouble as it is without you crashing this poxy thing *deliberately*. Why not just sit back and let nature take its course?'

'I ...'

'*Oh my god!*'

A fraction of a second ago, the mountains hadn't been there; then, all of a sudden, they were. Later, Thor swore blind that they missed the peak of the tallest and sharpest of them by no more than twelve thousandths of an inch.

'That was interesting, what you just said,' roared Frey, with his eyes shut.

'Was it?'

'You said *Oh my god*. Didn't know you were religious, Thor.'

'Just an expression.'

'Ah.' Frey's knuckles whitened on the grab handle. 'Pity. We could do with some divine assistance right now.' (Holt 1995: 160–61)[1]

[1] Thanks are due to my colleague, Lane Whitesell of the University of Central Oklahoma, for bringing Tom Holt's novels to my attention.

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The above passage, from Tom Holt's novel *Odds and Gods*, uses absurdist humour to raise some issues that often come up in one strain of post-1940 fiction that is concerned with Old Norse mythology. Some works in this category are quite serious and approach the issues at hand with tragic poignancy; other works, such as Holt's novel, are comical, though not without a poignancy of their own. The strain of fiction encompassing both serious and comical works that are concerned with the limitations of the Æsir — the ways in which they are less than omnipotent and ever-living, less than what is ordinarily meant by the word 'divine' — constitutes the first of the two major categories of post-1940 fiction to be considered in this chapter. In this category, the Æsir and other supernatural beings from Old Norse mythology appear under their own names and are more or less recognizable as the characters we know from medieval sources, though they are often thrown into new situations involving modern technology and other features of post-medieval life that are incongruous with an Eddic ambience. The other category to be considered consists of post-1940 fiction that draws on characters, situations and plots found in Old Norse mythology but presents them in new guises and under different names, so that these works' indebtedness to Old Norse mythology might go unrecognized by readers not familiar with that mythological tradition. For convenience, the second category will be labelled as 'Underlying Archetypes'; the first category will be called 'The Poignant *Nachleben* of the Æsir'.

There are, however, other ways of categorizing the fictional works with which this study is concerned. Science fiction is the appropriate classification for some works, and others are best classified as fantasy fiction (occasionally, one author produces both science fiction and fantasy fiction). The two genres have different origins, however. In Victorian England, fantasy fiction got its start with works by William Morris and George MacDonald.[2] The writing of fantasy came late to America and might never have occurred there were it not for British precedents. The first American writer who made a notable contribution to fantasy fiction was an early-twentieth-century Texan, Robert E. Howard, who never travelled anywhere but nonetheless had a fascination with what he had read about Europe, Africa and Asia (further discussion of Howard

[2] Secondary scholarship that traces the history of fantasy fiction includes Cornwell (1990), Jackson (2005), Irwin (1976) and Hume (1985). I am indebted to my colleague Timothy Murphy of Oklahoma State University for his insights into the history of science fiction and fantasy fiction, but what I present is a synthesis reflecting my own views based on my own reading of primary texts, and Professor Murphy would perhaps not agree with it in every detail.

occurs in the next section of this study).[3] Typically, fantasy novels take place in some Otherworld that is more or less medieval in its social customs, clothing and weaponry. A medieval or pseudo-medieval setting is alien to America, and readers who love fantasy novels typically love medieval European literature, especially literary works that include magic and marvels — for example, chivalric romances, Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* and hero tales such as *Beowulf*. Anyone who specializes in medieval literature and then turns for the first time to examine modern fantasy fiction can easily see that the same thematic concerns and tropes are shared by both bodies of literature. Because large quantities of fantasy fiction have been written in modern English and can be read by Anglophone children, the typical route for a reader in the English-speaking world is to be exposed to fantasy fiction first, and then go on to reading medieval texts. Numerous scholars who specialize in the Middle Ages began as readers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fantasy fiction. Because of this genre's familiarity to medievalists, little further discussion of the beginnings of fantasy fiction in the nineteenth century is needed here.

One additional point must be noted, however. From the nineteenth century onward, fantasy fiction has always been essentially mythopoeic; therefore it is not surprising that the first nineteenth-century fantasy novelist, William Morris, should have drawn heavily upon Norse mythology in his novels. Morris knew Icelandic and produced several poems and prose narratives that are translations or adaptations of medieval Icelandic narratives. Adaptation is perhaps a more accurate label than translation, for Morris put his own stamp on these narratives. Rather than going into detail about Morris and other pre-1940 fantasy novelists, this study will focus on fiction from 1940 onward; the indebtedness that twentieth-century writers have to Morris is, however, acknowledged explicitly by one author who, as we shall see, makes an allusion to a Morris poem (*Sigurd the Volsung*) by entitling a 1983 novella 'The Sorrow of Odin the Goth'.[4]

[3] De Camp (1983) has written one of several biographies of Robert E. Howard; De Camp's is of special interest because De Camp is, besides being Howard's biographer, one of the writers considered in this study. A few scholars have written analyses of Howard's fiction, but none are of any particular interest for the purposes of this chapter.

[4] For the sake of clarity it must be explained that this novella's author, Poul Anderson, originally published 'The Sorrow of Odin the Goth' in 1983, but because that was the year of publication for his most important myth-based work of fiction, the novel *Orion Shall Rise*, 'The Sorrow of Odin the Goth' will be disambiguated by referring to its 1991 appearance in a collection of Anderson's time-travel stories, the book *Time Patrolman*. This book is in any case the most convenient way of gaining access to 'The Sorrow of Odin the Goth.'

Science fiction is a genre less well known to medievalists. Whereas fantasy fiction looks toward the past, science fiction — aside from the subgenres of time-travel stories, alternate history and 'Steampunk' — is futuristic in its approach. In the nineteenth century, when technological innovations began to proliferate rapidly — the steam engine, the telegraph and so forth — writers began to realize that the world was changing profoundly. These writers used their imaginations to extrapolate the outcome of developments in science and technology that might hypothetically occur in the future.[5] Some consider Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to be the first science fiction novel because of its use of Galvan's discoveries concerning electricity; others would contend that the first science-fiction novelist was the nineteenth-century Frenchman Jules Verne. However, because technological innovations quickly dominated American society from the invention of the steam engine onward, American writers quickly became involved with science fiction. For many Americans, speculation about the future was of more interest than dreams of the medieval past on the other side of the Atlantic. Of the American writers discussed in this study, the one who was most deeply involved in 'hard' science fiction — that is, science fiction based on a firm grasp of mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology as opposed to wild speculation — and was also a prolific writer of pseudo-medieval fantasy happened to be a Danish-American with a degree in engineering; his 'hard' science fiction novels incorporate mathematical equations concerning planetary orbits and the like, but his parentage, as we shall see, drew him into the study of Scandinavian languages and of medieval Scandinavian history, legends, and myths. He is, therefore, a special case. Although many readers enjoy both science fiction and fantasy fiction, writers tend to specialize in one or the other of these two genres.

Someone who has read little or no science fiction may have the impression that science fiction is all about travel to other planets and the discovery of extraterrestrial life forms. Jules Verne's best-known novel did indeed concern a trip to the moon. Much science fiction, however, involves futuristic scenarios having nothing to do with spaceships or alien planets. Two of the most important science fiction novels of the twentieth century, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1948), take place on Earth and are concerned with social and political changes prompted by technological innovations in, respectively, biochemistry and electronic surveillance. These novels take place in the future, but their authors use them as vehicles to address issues

[5] The most important secondary scholarship to consult is Suvin (1983), Stableford (1985), Ashley (2001) and Bould et al. (2009).

of concern to them as mid-twentieth-century writers. In fiction involving space exploration too, the concerns of the writers' own lifetimes dominate. Technological innovation has changed all people's lives and is, or should be, of concern to everybody. Science fiction is a literary vehicle for expressing these concerns. It sometimes expresses optimism about the future, but often it sounds a warning. Though it might seem as if the concerns of Old Norse mythology are far removed from futuristic speculation, we shall see that at least one science fiction novelist expresses his concerns about the future by means of a narrative template involving the Æsir.

The Poignant Nachleben *of the Æsir*

Not every culture has religious beliefs that are eschatological or teleological in their focus. Greco-Roman paganism, for instance, seemed to assume that once Zeus (or Jupiter) had defeated his rivals and settled in as the ruler of Olympus, he would simply reign forever. For Iranian and Celtic parallels to Norse eschatology, see Ellis Davidson (1964: 204) — but to most readers and writers of science fiction and fantasy, the Iranian and Celtic examples would be less known, and the Old Norse concept of Ragnarök would be unusual enough to make it stand out among other belief systems. These include the Judeo-Christian belief system with which writers of popular fiction during the last few decades would generally be most familiar.

Scholars speculate that even though the story of Ragnarök originated before Scandinavia's conversion to Christianity, Christian influence is present in the similarities between the Æsir's final battle against the Jötnar and the Apocalypse in the Christian Bible's Book of Revelation. *Völuspá*, where the events involved in Ragnarök are prophesied, holds out a ray of hope by alluding briefly to the creation of a new world in which the gods Baldr and Höðr, who before Ragnarök had been killed through malice and treachery, would be reborn along with a few other lesser-known Æsir; this prophecy of a bright future may seem to resemble the Book of Revelation's 'a new heaven and a new earth', and the good god Baldr may seem quite Christlike. However, Ellis Davidson in the above-mentioned passage asserts that these similarities have been exaggerated by scholars: 'I would discount much of what has been written deriving the material of *Völuspá* from Christian sources.' What holds true for this scholar holds true *a fortiori* for fiction writers, most of whom are more likely to disregard the similarities between Ragnarök and Christian eschatology; the differences between the two belief systems are, at first glance, more striking than the similarities. The Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation is a

battle in which the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil; the same cannot be said for the final battle between the Æsir and the Jötnar. Even if Baldr and Höðr are reborn, the chief Æsir — Óðinn, Þórr, and others — go down in defeat.

From the perspective of today's Western culture, the permanent defeat and death of a pantheon's chief god make him markedly different from the better-known Jehovah and Jupiter. The mortality of Óðinn and the other Æsir seems to have made a strong impression on imaginative writers from 1940 onward — and indeed even before 1940, for one short story written in the 1920s or 1930s must be included in the present discussion. Robert E. Howard, an American writer of pulp fiction best known for his fictional character Conan the Barbarian, died in 1936, but at some unspecified point during his brief lifetime he wrote a story called 'The Grey God Passes', which was published posthumously in 1962.[6] Only from 1962 onward could this previously unknown story make an impact on other writers; however, it seems as if Howard had been thinking along the same lines as other writers in the first half of the twentieth century, albeit quite independently of them. In 'The Grey God Passes' we can observe the first stirrings of some preoccupations that would come to dominate post-1940 fiction dealing with *Völuspá* and, in particular, with Óðinn.

'The Grey God Passes' tells the story of the historical (AD 1014) Battle of Clontarf, fought near Dublin by the forces of the Christian king Brian Boru and his Viking enemies. Included in the story along with King Brian and several other historical personages is a fictional protagonist, an Irish thrall named Conn who just before the beginning of the battle encounters 'a tall man, wrapped in a cloak, beneath which the thrall glimpsed a sheen of mail' (Howard 2007: 153). To any reader with even a cursory knowledge of Norse mythology, the tall man is immediately recognizable as Óðinn: 'The stranger wore a slouch hat pulled so low that from his shadowed features only one eye gleamed, cold and grim as the grey sea.' Though the stranger does not tell Conn his name, he refers overtly to 'Asgaard' [*sic*] and to 'Ragnarok' [*sic*].[7] At the end

[6] August Derleth first presented 'The Grey God Passes' to the public in the 1962 anthology *Dark Mind, Dark Heart*, but because this anthology is out of print 'The Grey God Passes' is most readily available to readers in pages 153–82 of *The Best of Robert E. Howard* (Howard 2007).

[7] From this point onward, variant spellings of Old Norse names in quotations from works of twentieth-century fiction will mostly go unnoted, and in my discussion of these mythological characters as handled by fiction writers my spellings will be consistent with those of each author.

of the story another character, an Irishman named Turlogh, explains to Conn the vision they have just seen, a vision of a 'vague, gigantic form' that 'went flying, beard and wild locks streaming in the gale, cloak billowing out like great wings—speeding into the mysterious blue mists that pulsed and shimmered in the brooding North'. The explanation:

> 'It is Odin, god of the sea-people,' said Turlogh somberly. 'His children are broken, his altars crumble, and his worshippers fallen before the swords of the South. He flees the new gods and their children, and returns to the blue gulfs of the North which gave him birth.' (Howard 2007: 181–82)

The mention of 'the new gods and their children' refers to the Christian Trinity and to the Christian believers who have just won a decisive battle over the heathen Vikings. Turlogh assumes that since Odin no longer has worshippers in Ireland, this deity must retreat to Scandinavia ('the North'), where he still has worshippers. The Irishman makes no prediction as to how long Odin will remain in existence in the Nordic lands 'which gave him birth.' On the basis of Turlogh's explanation alone, Odin's mortality is not evident.

Conn, however, has already heard a somewhat different account from Odin's own mouth. At the beginning of the battle, the cloaked stranger, 'like one who speaks to himself,' had delivered this monologue:

> Now comes the reaping of kings, the garnering of chiefs like a harvest. Gigantic shadows stalk red-handed across the world, and night is falling on Asgaard. I hear the cries of long-dead heroes whistling in the void, and the shouts of forgotten gods. To each being there is an appointed time, and even the gods must die. (Howard 2007: 154)

After a vivid and, by Howard's standards, unusually well-written description of twelve armoured women riding on winged horses in the sky around the cloaked stranger, Odin continues:

> '*The Choosers of the Slain*!' thundered the stranger, flinging his arms wide in a terrible gesture. 'They ride in the twilight of the North! The winged hooves spurn the rolling clouds, the web of Fate is spun, the Loom and Spindle broken! Doom roars upon the gods and night falls on Asgaard! Night and the trumpets of Ragnarok!' (Howard 2007: 155)

Since Odin can be assumed to speak with greater knowledge than the human character Turlogh, it seems evident that Odin is not merely retreating from a country where his worshippers have been defeated in battle; in Howard's imagination, the Battle of Clontarf is somehow linked with Ragnarök itself.

The causal connection is not entirely clear, for the circumstances prophesied in *Völuspá* have not come to pass; there is no *fimbulvetr* ('mighty winter'), no treachery among family members, no mustering of the giants and other monsters against whom the Æsir must fight. In Howard's rather hazy conception, the defeat of the Dublin Vikings at the Battle of Clontarf meant a decisive defeat for Norse paganism, and thus heralded the onset of Ragnarök. But Ragnarök is alluded to only in Odin's monologue; the events of Ragnarök themselves lie outside the boundaries of Howard's narrative.

'The Grey God Passes' is not a pessimistic story. The Dublin Vikings are the enemies of its protagonist, for Conn had been captured and enslaved by them. Though Odin laments the doom that he foresees, what is tragedy for him is happiness for the Irish. The story ends on an optimistic note: 'And he [Odin] went on into the dusk, leaving Conn to his freedom — from thralldom and cruelty, as both he and all the Gaels were now free of the shadow of the Grey God and his ruthless worshippers' (Howard 2007: 182). The complete absence of the *Jötnar* and the Miðgarðr Serpent as antagonists of the Æsir makes it possible for Howard to cast Odin as a cruel, ruthless villain. A very different approach is taken in the novella that makes 1940 a turning-point for the incorporation of Norse mythology into modern fiction, 'The Roaring Trumpet' by Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague De Camp. The title refers to the *Gjallarhorn*, which Heimdallr is to blow to summon the Æsir to their final battle, and the novella incorporates the beginning phases of Ragnarök into its fictional framework.[8] Pratt and De Camp portray the Norse gods more or less sympathetically, though the Æsir are not the actual protagonists of the story.

'The Roaring Trumpet' is the first of Pratt and De Camp's novellas to feature Harold Shea as its protagonist. Shea is a young American psychologist who has figured out a method for transporting himself to parallel worlds — worlds in which magic, marvels and supernatural beings actually exist. He plunges into these worlds purely for love of adventure; before devising his method of travelling to parallel worlds, he had been involved in relatively mundane — but, for a city-dweller in 1940, still unusual — diversions such as horseback-riding.

[8] 'The Roaring Trumpet' was first published in the May 1940 issue of the science fiction magazine *Unknown*, but was later collected together with two other adventures of Harold Shea and published in a book called *The Compleat Enchanter* (1975). Since *The Compleat Enchanter* is more readily available than back issues of *Unknown* are, page numbers from the book publication of 'The Roaring Trumpet' will be cited in this discussion. It is worth noting that pages 335–41 of *The Compleat Enchanter* consist of an afterword, called 'Fletcher and I', by De Camp: this afterword contains much useful information.

Subsequent adventures of Harold Shea take place in the world of the *Kalevala*, the world of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the world of Ariosto's *Orlando* (to name only a few). In 1940, however, the world of Norse mythology was the top priority for Pratt and De Camp to write about in their first collaboration.

Pratt and De Camp were American writers, and in 1940 the United States had not yet entered into World War II. Even so, this hideous global conflict was undoubtedly much on their minds. Once again, as in the Great War of 1914–18, the lamps were going out all over Europe, and it must have seemed a very real possibility that Pratt and De Camp would not see them lit again in their lifetimes. Perhaps these specific circumstances, rather than a unique love of Norse mythology as opposed to other myths and legends, were what prompted Pratt and De Camp to settle on the tragic, killable, doomed Æsir as the first imaginary beings for Harold Shea to encounter. 'The Roaring Trumpet' is a novella with light overtones but sombre undertones.

Pratt was steeped in the lore of Norse mythology, De Camp less so. De Camp's reminiscences make it clear that the idea for 'The Roaring Trumpet' and most of the lore that enters into it had come from Pratt. Their character Harold Shea is largely ignorant of this lore, and at first he does not know what parallel world he has ended up in. Judging by the weather Shea assumes he has arrived in midwinter; but the first native he meets tells him: 'We are in May, and this is the Fimbulwinter' (Pratt and De Camp 1975: 12). Upon hearing this, 'a little prickle of horror filled Harold Shea, though the last word was meaningless to him.'[9]

Pratt and De Camp were gifted writers, well able to summon up the atmosphere of grandeur and menace that Howard could achieve only fitfully. Shea's intuition of dread is followed by:

> Faint and far, his ear caught a sound that might be the howling of a dog—or a wolf. As he sought for words there was a flutter of movement. Two big black birds, like oversize crows, slid down the wind past him and came to rest on the dry grass, looked at him for a second or two with bright, intelligent eyes, then took the air again.

And the alert reader, though not Shea himself, immediately recognizes Óðinn's ravens Huginn and Muninn. Indeed it quickly becomes clear that Shea's informant, the rider who had mentioned 'Fimbulwinter', is none other than the Allfather himself: 'From saddle to eyes he was enveloped in a faded blue cloak.

[9] In the eddic poem *Vafþrúðnismál* 44/6 and in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (*SnE* 2005: 49), *fimbulvetr* ('mighty winter') is the term applied to three severe winters in succession that occur before Ragnarök.

A formless slouch hat was pulled tight over his face, yet not so tight as to conceal the fact that he was full-bearded and gray' (Pratt and De Camp 1975: 12). One by one the Odinic details build up: 'a proud, unsmiling face in which the left eye socket was unpleasantly vacant', and on the next page:

> The man on the animal's back straightened suddenly so that Shea could see he was very tall indeed, a perfect giant. But before he had time to note anything more he felt himself caught and held with an almost physical force by that single eye. A stab of intense, burning cold seemed to run through him, inside his head, as though his brain had been pierced by an icicle.

In large part the impact of 'The Roaring Trumpet' results from powerfully evocative writing such as this. But Shea is a brash, cheeky, twentieth-century American, and his presence in the narrative often brings in notes of irreverence alongside the authors' descriptions of the awe-inspiring qualities of the Æsir.

When Heimdall enters the story, it becomes evident that he has the same sort of piercing gaze that Odinn [*sic*—Pratt's and De Camp's spelling] had wielded against Shea. But Heimdall, alongside the human protagonist, finds himself in the humiliating situation of having been imprisoned by Frost-Giants and reduced to passing the time in prison by capturing cockroaches and wagering with Shea on which cockroach will run fastest from a circle drawn on the floor of their prison cell:

> This time, after a few victories for Shea, Heimdall's roach began to win consistently. By the time the man across the passage had yelled 'Yngvi is a louse!' four times Shea found himself Heimdall's debtor to the extent of something like thirty million crowns. It made him suspicious. He watched the golden god narrowly during the next race, then burst out, 'Say, that's not fair! You're fixing my cockroach with your glittering eye and slowing him up!'
>
> 'What, mortal! Dare you accuse one of the Æsir?'
>
> 'You're damn right, I dare! If you're going to use your special powers, I won't play.'
>
> A smile slowly spread across Heimdall's face. 'Young Harald [*sic*—the Æsir pronounce Shea's first name as if it were the Norwegian name "Harald"], you do not lack for boldness, and I have said before that you show glimmerings of wit. In truth, I have slowed up your steed; it is not meet that one of the Æsir should be beaten at aught by a mortal. But come, let that one go, and we will begin again with new mounts, for I fear that animal of yours will never again be the same.' (Pratt and De Camp 1975: 68–69)

The authors achieve amusing effects from the juxtaposition of Heimdall's august diction with the pettiness of his actions. Despite the rationalization

voiced by the golden god, it surely ought to be *infra dignitatem* for him to use his divine power to cheat at cockroach-racing. With 'The Roaring Trumpet' there enters into modern fiction for the first time a note that will become dominant in subsequent depictions of the Æsir: a comical lack of dignity in their actions and in the situations into which they find themselves thrust willy-nilly. Pratt and De Camp's unique genius is to enable these actions and situations to coexist, somehow, with genuinely awe-inspiring majesty — a difficult trick to pull off. These authors' deft handling of the Æsir's formal, archaic diction plays no small part in the success of their first collaboration.

Appropriately, Harold Shea speaks the slangy East Coast English of an American living *c.* 1940. Of course his manner of speaking contrasts with that of the Æsir. One might expect all the mythological characters in 'The Roaring Trumpet' to speak more or less as the Æsir do: giants and trolls might be expected to speak more coarsely, but still with archaic diction. Sacrificing consistency for the sake of amusement, however, Pratt and De Camp devise American-sounding dialogue for most of the mythological characters other than the Æsir. An unseen occupant of a nearby prison cell repeatedly refers to somebody named Yngvi (who never enters into the story) as 'a louse'; and the villains of 'The Roaring Trumpet', the Frost-Giants, speak like street thugs from Brooklyn, with phrases such as 'youse guys', 'beat it' and 'make it snappy'. At one point the giant Skrymir greets another giant with the words 'How's every little thing wit' you? Commere, I wantcha to meet a friend of mine. This here guy's Asa-Thor!' (Pratt and De Camp 1975: 51).

For this reason, I would hesitate to lean too heavily on an interpretation of 'The Roaring Trumpet' that views the Æsir as the Western Allies in World War II, with the giants as the Axis powers. Pratt and De Camp's Brooklynese giants are hard to take seriously as evildoers. But they are no mere Moon-Face Martin (the farcical gangster in Cole Porter's 1930s musical *Anything Goes*, who turns out to be a harmless tough-talking poseur) either. The giants in 'The Roaring Trumpet' are cruel, brutal and intent on the destruction of the Æsir. Shea's intervention in the early phases of Ragnarök results in some successes for the Æsir that run counter to tradition. Because he is human, Shea can see through some tricks that deceive the Norse gods, and in the quest to retrieve Thor's hammer from the giants Shea is able to tell the Æsir that Loki is competing against fire itself in an eating contest, and that the old woman whom Thor wrestles is actually Old Age and that the cat Thor attempts to lift is actually the Miðgarðr Serpent. Shea is also able to detect the presence of the hammer Mjöllnir so that Thor can retrieve it from the giants. Moreover the human protagonist uses his knowledge of psychology to diagnose paranoia in

the troll who is acting as his and Heimdall's prison warden; consequently, Shea can manipulate the troll into releasing them from prison.

Despite Shea's efforts, however, it becomes clear that, in the end, Ragnarök cannot be forestalled. On a visit to the *völva* ('prophetess') who possesses foreknowledge of Ragnarök, she becomes angry at the advantages that Shea has given the Æsir, and she casts a spell that sends him back to 'whatever misbegotten place ye came from!' (Pratt and De Camp 1975: 90) — that is, back to his office in twentieth-century America. His last glimpse of the Norse mythological world is the hag's bony fingers gesturing toward him, and the last noise he hears from that world is the sounding of Heimdall's horn: 'The first notes of the roaring trumpet sang and swelled and filled all space in a tremendous peal of martial, triumphant music.' Though the music may sound triumphant, it seems unlikely that the Æsir will triumph. Shea's brief sojourn among them probably did not make enough of a difference. The story's central theme had emerged earlier, when the human protagonist and Heimdall were locked up in prison together:

> Shea had not entirely forgotten his irritation over Heimdall's patronizing manner, but the Sleepless One held his interest more than the choleric and rather slowwitted Thor or the sneering Loki. 'If you don't mind my asking, Golden One, why can't you just use your powers to get out?'
>
> 'To all things there is a limit,' replied Heimdall, 'of size, of power, and of duration. Wide is the lifetime of a god; wider than of a thousand of your feeble species one after the other. Yet even gods grow old and die.' (Pratt and De Camp 1975: 64)

Heimdall's statement resembles the statement made by Howard's Odin, 'even the gods must die'. The difference is that in Howard's story the death of the Norse gods is not regretted by anyone other than themselves, but in 'The Roaring Trumpet' Harold Shea concludes that even though Thor is choleric and slowwitted, while Loki is sneering, Heimdall is basically a nice guy who deserves help — and deserves it even though Heimdall has a patronizing manner and a tendency to cheat at cockroach-racing.

Perhaps Americans in 1940 felt a similar ambivalence about the French and the British who were so hard pressed during the first few years of World War II: despite some objectionable characteristics of the French and the British, they were vastly preferable to their Axis enemies, and they deserved to be helped. In 1940, lend-lease had not even begun, although the United States Congress was discussing it; the Americans were not yet helping the British, and nobody could say with certainty whether America would ever enter the war. The limited, and probably futile, help that Shea was able to give the Æsir might have seemed

similar to the small amount of help the United States gave the British before America's entry into the war in December 1941; and the genuinely melancholy tone of the novella's ending might be taken to express the frustration that well-meaning Americans experienced as they turned their eyes toward Europe. Americans in 1940 who felt compassion for Britain and France must have feared that those countries were as doomed as the mythological Æsir. 'The Roaring Trumpet' is light entertainment, as are all the Harold Shea stories, but it exhibits a depth of feeling that subsequent Harold Shea stories lack. In this novella, poignancy coexists with humour of the absurd involving cockroach-racing in which gods cheat, and Brooklynese slang in the mouths of mythological giants. At the moments when 'The Roaring Trumpet' is poignant rather than silly, surely its poignancy results from the dovetailing of the mythological Ragnarök with the real-world events taking place during the writing of this novella in 1940, when the world was at war and there was no assurance of ultimate victory for the Allies. Shea's banishment from the Norse mythological world at a moment that comes too soon for him to witness the actual outcome of the battle between the gods and the giants seems to mirror the situation that existed in 1940, when nobody knew what the outcome of World War II would be.

After 1940 for several decades onward, the most notable works of fiction that draw on Old Norse mythology belong to the 'Underlying Archetypes' section of this study, and will be discussed there. This is, however, the proper place to note briefly that in 1988, Douglas Adams wrote a comic novel called *The Long Dark Teatime of the Soul* which is, so far as I know, the first work of fiction to suggest that once the Norse gods have no more worshippers and therefore no more sense of purpose, they may end up as derelicts or in nursing homes. Adams's Odin inhabits a posh nursing home in this novel. A trifling entertainment, *The Long Dark Teatime of the Soul* need not detain us long. One subtle touch in it is, however, worth noting. The human protagonist of the novel, Dirk, asks a dishevelled vagabond if he has lost something, and in reply:

> 'The sky?' he said, challenging Dirk to find this a good enough answer. He looked up toward it carefully, so as not to lose his balance. He seemed not to like what he saw in the dim, orange, street-lit pallor of the clouds, and slowly looked back down again till he was staring at a point just in front of his feet.
>
> 'The ground?' he said, with evident great dissatisfaction, and then was struck with a sudden thought.
>
> 'Frogs?' he said, wobbling, his gaze up to meet Dirk's rather bewildered one. 'I used to like ... frogs.' (Adams 1988: 233–34)

Although Dirk does not realize this and the narrator never explains it for readers, the vagabond's mention of sky, ground and frogs links him to one theory (Schnittger 1916) of the peculiar epithets that describe the Norse god Hœnir. For readers well-versed in Norse mythology, this is one of the first indications in the novel that Dirk may be dealing with down-at-heel Norse gods. For other readers, it must seem to be random absurdism.

Tom Holt, like Adams an Englishman, wrote *Odds and Gods* several years after Adams's *The Long Dark Teatime of the Soul*, and insofar as *Odds and Gods* involves a nursing home it may owe something to Adams, but it owes much more to Pratt and De Camp. Holt's placing of the Æsir into comically undignified situations far surpasses both 'The Roaring Trumpet' and *The Long Dark Teatime of the Soul*. Holt — perhaps taking his cue from Pratt and De Camp's statement that even the gods age, though they age more slowly than humans — posits the existence of Sunnyvoyde, a shabby nursing home for retired deities. Deities from numerous pantheons inhabit Sunnyvoyde; along with Odin, Thor and Frey, the Egyptian god Osiris and the Hellenic god Pan are quite prominent in the plot. Nonetheless *Odds and Gods* can be considered a direct descendant of 'The Roaring Trumpet.' In addition to Pratt and De Camp's idea of gods aging slowly, Holt also derives a great deal of fun from the indignities to which they are subjected, and he makes much play of the incongruity between the majestic, or once-majestic, Æsir and the slangy modern English argot of the twentieth-century world around them.

Unlike Pratt and De Camp, who brought a twentieth-century man into contact with the Æsir through Harold Shea's travel to a parallel world, Holt brings the Æsir into the twentieth century. Odin, Thor, Frey, and Baldur have been residents of Sunnyvoyde for 996 years, ever since 'the Great Aesir had clocked off for the last time, received their signed testimonials and gold watches from the Scandinavian nations, and retired' (Holt 1995: 18). Also unlike Pratt and De Camp, Holt eschews archaic diction in the dialogue he writes for the Norse gods. His Æsir are as slangy as Pratt and De Camp's Frost-Giants are, but in *Odds and Gods* the slang is distinctively British. An Americanized Thor would never have described a malfunctioning aircraft as 'this poxy thing'. Even the title of the novel contains wordplay that might go unrecognized by American readers: the title is a take-off on the British idiomatic expression 'odds and sods', meaning eccentric characters. From beginning to end, *Odds and Gods* owes much of its effect to Holt's dexterity with breezy colloquialisms.

Occasionally the third-person narrator makes use of grandiose diction, but only for purposes of bathetic deflation. Chapter 2 of the novel, which introduces the Aesir, begins in the past, with a bard singing in the meadhall of King

Hrólfr Kraki. A passage that is far too long to quote in full describes the beginning of the universe, the Heroic Age, and 'the going-down of the gods themselves' (Holt 1995: 14). Then, in a passage too brilliant not to quote:

> As the poet sang, the world seemed to grow tight and brittle, and King Hrolf nervously motioned for more logs to be heaped on the fire.
>
> And then the poet told of the new dawn of the gods, how they rise again from the ashes of the burnt Valhalla and build a new castle that will never be thrown down, a shimmering, sublime fortress of golden stone where Odin and Thor and Tyr the One-Handed and Frey, who is the friend of wretched mortals, will reign for ever, feasting and delighting in the song and restoring vintage traction engines. And there will be no more winters in this ...
>
> 'Doing what?'
>
> The poet shut his eyes. For one blessed moment he thought he'd actually got away with it.
>
> 'Um,' he said, 'restoring vintage traction engines. And no more shall hoar-frost fasten on hawthorn ...'
>
> 'Vintage what?'
>
> Sod, fuck and bugger this stupid, lousy song, muttered the poet to himself. Because some bastard always stops me and asks *What's a traction engine?* And I don't sodding well *know*. And neither did my father nor his father before him, and does it really bloody well *matter* anyway?
>
> 'Traction engines. I think they're, um, things that gods sort of, well, restore.'
>
> King Hrolf leaned forward, gathering the cowl of the poet's hood in his frying-pan-broad fist.
>
> 'Are you,' he growled, 'taking the piss?' (Holt 1995: 14–15)

After some further badinage between Hrolf Kraki and his unfortunate poet, the poet placates the disgruntled king with the excuse that 'it really and truly says traction engines. Do I look like the sort of bloke who could make up a thing like that?' (Holt 1995: 16). Here the author is having great fun with the absurd idea that, since *Völuspá* is a prophecy of things to come, it could include mention of future inventions such as traction engines. By this logic, the seeress who uttered the prophecy need not even have known what 'traction engine' signifies, and certainly poets who later recited her words would not have known; the words, meaningless to poets, could still have been handed down by tradition.

In order to occupy their time at Sunnyvoyde, Odin and Thor have to sneak away from the nursing home to a shed where their traction engine is hidden. Once it is restored, though, what had been described as a sort of railway engine

proves to have the capacity to fly. Apparently godhood is still of some avail in Holt's fictional universe. Not all of the Aesir, however, ride off for adventures on the flying engine. Baldur remains in the nursing home, where he tries to organize a protest against the inclusion of rice pudding in the residents' meals. During the protest, an echo of the traditional Baldr occurs in one passage: 'Baldur sighed. In his face was reflected the transcendent pain and sorrow of' — and one expects the sentence to go on to allude to Baldur's sad past and his unjust death. Instead the sentence concludes 'all organisers everywhere who come up against total unrelenting apathy' (Holt 1995: 248). Once again, the juxtaposition of the sublime and the banal is superbly comical.

In the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Frey is terrified when the flying engine barely misses crashing into a mountain, and he expresses a desire for 'divine assistance'. The irony, of course, is that the Aesir are themselves divine and therefore ought to be able to cope with the situation. But even in the Old Norse tradition that Holt is lampooning, Baldur could be killed by a mistletoe dart, and the other gods could be killed by giants and monsters at the battle of Ragnarök. And, contrary to the poet's account on page 15 of *Odds and Gods*, tradition does not prophesy a rebirth for most of the Æsir. Whatever deity — if any — might be truly supreme and eternal is as unclear in Old Norse tradition as it is in Holt's novel. If Thor were in fact religious, to whom would he pray? Frey might wish for divine assistance, but he gets none. In *Odds and Gods*, all of the deities from all of the world's pantheons have limitations; throughout the novel, in various ways, they are in danger and have a great deal to worry about — even the deities from belief systems that, traditionally, never were eschatological in their focus. Holt extends the limitations of the Æsir to deities from other cultures around the world, but it seems clear that the idea of gods with limitations — gods who can die through violence or through the debilitation of old age, or who if they do not die just get older and weaker — came to Holt through medieval Scandinavian tradition and also through the twentieth-century tradition, established by 'The Grey God Passes' and 'The Roaring Trumpet', in which fantasy writers emphasize the limitations of the Æsir. Holt, unlike Pratt and De Camp, was born at a time when 'The Grey God Passes' had been published and was readily available to readers; but in tone, nothing could be more unlike Howard's humourless prose than Holt's drollery is. The tone in *Odds and Gods* is somewhat like that of 'The Roaring Trumpet', but Anglicized and many times more absurd. Absurdity and poignancy are not mutually exclusive, though. Even at the most laughable moments of *Odds and Gods*, sorrow for the decay of old age arises.

In another comic novel that he wrote in 2000, Holt takes a different approach to Norse mythology. Titled *Valhalla*, this novel is mainly concerned with the afterlife of human beings and with Odin's traditional function as Lord of the Dead. Unlike the affable old duffer who putters about with traction engines in *Odds and Gods*, the Odin of *Valhalla* is crafty, malevolent and powerful. His chief limitation is that he is dependent on his greedy agent, Lin Kortright, for getting him his job as the chief Norse god and lord of Valhalla. The absurd premise of this novel is that in its fictional universe, supernatural beings obtain various positions through their agent's skill at negotiating deals — though it is unclear with whom the agent negotiates. Once again, the supreme deity is undefined. The being known as 'Odin' in this novel could just as easily have ended up with some other sort of job, under some other name. Apart from the name 'Odin', the most traditional thing about his *modus operandi* is that he wanders the world incognito and, like the Óðinn of the Eddas and *Völsunga saga*, is often tricky and treacherous. He is a thoroughly unlikeable character, and *Valhalla* has none of the poignancy of *Odds and Gods*. It seems to be trying for sheer absurdity, rather than absurdity plus pathos.

The nature of humour of the absurd is such that many things go unexplained: one simply accepts them. Accordingly, Holt never really explains how it is that although Lin Kortright is a modern American businessman and a human being, with a human daughter who dies in the course of the narrative, the agent also seems to have existed for millions of years, so that he was able to get Odin his job far back in the mists of time. *Valhalla* is concerned with the play of ideas, and its humour is largely intellectual. In playing with ideas, it often addresses concepts of importance for Old Norse mythology. In one passage, a character named Howard, who in life had amused himself with medieval re-enactment games, is surprised to find himself in Valhalla after he dies. He doesn't enjoy the fighting, feasting and ale-swilling very much—at least not at first:

> Or maybe, Howard reflected, shoving a chunk of utterly authentic pork fat on to the edge of his trencher, maybe this is *exactly* how it was, and the only misapprehension is on the part of those who equate Valhalla with *Heaven*. For all he knew, the Norse afterlife for people who didn't come to a bad end after a lifetime of killing and bullying was really rather pleasant: quiet and peaceful in a Laura Ashley sort of way, with books and bone china teacups and asparagus quiche and big handmade teddy bears. (Holt 2000: 7–8)

In a dark turn this essentially gentle character, after a long time spent in Valhalla, gives up his Laura Ashley daydreams and learns to revel in the killing and mayhem that go on there every day. *Valhalla*, though wryly comical, is a

thoroughly dark novel from beginning to end. It functions chiefly as an indictment of greed, bloodlust and Nietzschean cravings for power, and it makes use of Norse mythological tradition to do so. The novel makes its points effectively enough, but except for an occasional passage such as the one quoted above, it is rather a slog and not always very witty.

Holt is at his best in *Odds and Gods* and in a previous novel, *Expecting Someone Taller*. Published in 1987, *Expecting Someone Taller* was his first novel aside from some continuations of E. F. Benson's 'Mapp and Lucia' series. Holt seems to have a gift for handling pre-existing fictional characters or mythological traditions: *Expecting Someone Taller* is a take-off on Wagner's Ring cycle and, as such, features Wotan and other characters from Germanic legend. Because it is so thoroughly rooted in Wagner's operas rather than in medieval Scandinavian mythology, *Expecting Someone Taller* will not be included in the present study. It must, however, be noted that for opera-lovers *Expecting Someone Taller* is the funniest novel ever written, and is a remarkable achievement for a writer in his early twenties.

Inexplicably, Holt has never received the international recognition given to Neil Gaiman. Born in England, Gaiman later moved to Minnesota, and then to Wisconsin, both of which are states in the American upper Midwest; his widely acclaimed 2001 novel *American Gods* seems to be this expatriate Englishman's attempt to come to terms with the fact that he has chosen to live in a country where the cultural traditions of his birthplace are valued little.[10] The human characters in this novel are supposed to be Americans by birth, but Gaiman's accuracy at mimicking American English in the dialogue that he puts in his characters' mouths is patchy at best. Not only does he have a tin ear for American English: the novel as a whole is bloated and repetitious. It depends on two simple ideas that Gaiman belabours at tedious length. One idea is that when immigrants came to America from the Old World, some of them still paid heed to the gods of their ancestors and to superstitions about fairies, kobolds and the like; thus these supernatural beings, or rather faded versions of them, eke out a tenuous existence on American soil. Odin is one of

[10] Not only is *American Gods* acclaimed by reviewers, it has also attracted the attention of some academics. No attention will be given, however, to the clutch of articles on this novel in academic journals, for these articles are nugatory: Gaiman's muddled thinking and long-winded exposition are undeserving of serious consideration, and his novel comes under discussion in the present study only to indicate its shortcomings. It should be noted, however, that in 2017 Gaiman capitalized on the success of *American Gods* by publishing a book called *Norse Mythology*. Since the new book is merely a retelling of Scandinavian myths in Gaiman's own words, it need not receive consideration in this study (but see Chapter 10.4 below).

those supernatural beings, but at the end of the novel when the 'real' Odin, the authentic Scandinavian Odin, manifests himself to the novel's protagonist who is visiting Iceland, his American counterpart is, by comparison, revealed to be rather shoddy — like a photocopy of a photocopy. Gaiman's other idea is that the fading of the supernatural beings has occurred not only because the cultural traditions of immigrants have become attenuated with the passing of time and with spatial distance from their homelands, and not only because of the march of modernity throughout the world, but also because there is something about America itself that is uniquely resistant to gods. By means of a protagonist whose ancestry is partly Native American, Gaiman tackles the question of Native American deities and concludes that they just don't amount to much and never did. Who could really worship a trickster such as Coyote? It should also be noted that the author chooses to give very little attention to Judeo-Christian tradition in America.

The American version of Odin is the mover and shaker behind the events of this novel. Masquerading as an ordinary businessman in a suit and tie, he is recognizable by his pseudonym 'Wednesday', by his one eye and by the two ravens who tend to show up when he is present. Like Holt's Odin in *Odds and Gods*, but in a much less amusing way, Gaiman's Odin must cope with the banalities of modern American life. At one point, he idles away his time by leafing through an old copy of *Readers Digest* magazine; at another point, he eats potato salad from a Tupperware container. Such details may provoke a quiet smile from readers, but the hilarity so prevalent in *Odds and Gods* is not Gaiman's goal. The inclusion of gods from various pantheons in *American Gods* probably owes something to Holt's novel, but Gaiman is interested neither in poignancy nor in fun. The émigré author is concerned with theorizing about the nature of twenty-first-century American society — why it is as dreary and soul-deadening as it is.

Gaiman argues that traditional beliefs brought to America from the eastern hemisphere are evanescent because Americans quickly find new things to deify and worship: transportation technology (first railway trains, later automobiles and aeroplanes), television, credit cards, narcotics. In this connection comes the wittiest *aperçu* of the novel, spoken by a leprechaun named Sweeney, who calls America 'a world in which opiates have become the religion of the masses' (Gaiman 2001: 221). Given that other parts of the world are also plagued by drug addiction, technological fads and avarice, it might seem as if Gaiman's focus on America specifically is misguided. He offers one possible explanation, though. The Odin of America in his guise as 'Mister Wednesday' argues that America is more susceptible to short-lived enthusiasms than are other countries because America has no sense of self:

> 'This is the only country in the world,' said Wednesday, into the stillness, 'that worries about what it is.'
>
> 'What?'
>
> 'The rest of them know what they are. No one ever needs to go searching for the heart of Norway. Or looks for the soul of Mozambique. They know what they are.' (Gaiman 2001: 116)

If lack of a sense of identity is what is responsible for America's malaise, then it would seem to follow that other countries in the world are better off than America is. But Gaiman seems uncertain as to what he really wants to argue.

Elsewhere in the novel, the supernatural beings brought to the New World by European immigrants seem to encapsulate the cruelty and ruthlessness of European colonialism. A kobold transplanted from Germany to Wisconsin demands an annual human sacrifice, with the consequence that every year an American child or teenager goes missing, the fates of the victims unknown to the police but discovered by the novel's protagonist, Shadow, who eventually confronts the kobold. Typical of Americans, and typical of America's malaise as diagnosed by Mister Wednesday, Shadow has only a vague knowledge of his ancestry. His mother had never told him anything about his father, but Shadow's dark complexion and his dream-visions of a buffalo spirit seem to indicate that he is part Native American. Although he has served time in prison, Shadow seems to be less morally tainted than most of the American characters in the novel — which would be consistent with the idea that the evils of America come from Europe. A friendly and helpful Cherokee woman, who recognizes him as a Native American, seems to be a voice of morality even stronger than Shadow. A conversation between these two characters about Norse mythology brings out most clearly Gaiman's argument that America's moral taint comes from Europe: Shadow, who has been spending time with Mister Wednesday and learning about the Æsir, tells the Cherokee woman about the Norse custom of slaughtering victims as sacrifices to Odin, and in response she comments 'White people have some fucked-up gods, Mister Shadow' (Gaiman 2001: 171).

Perhaps because Óðinn had traditionally been a cruel god who demanded human sacrifices, it is Old Norse religion that becomes, for Gaiman, the epitome of all that is worst about America — the America that came into being through immigrants from the Old World. If one's cultural identity involves the cruelty of Óðinn, maybe it is better not to have a clear sense of cultural identity after all. It would follow, then, that the Old World, whence all the cruelty flowed, must actually be worse off than America is. The character who com-

plains about America's lack of a clear sense of self is Mister Wednesday, Óðinn's avatar in America, and of course it would be to his advantage if Americans were more closely in touch with their European heritage. If modern Americans actually were worshippers of Óðinn, he would have much more power and would not be merely the faded Mister Wednesday who leads such a hardscrabble existence in this novel. For in Gaiman's conception, the vitality of a supernatural being is maintained by human believers.

Reading this novel, one can conclude that Americans should not want the same things that Mister Wednesday and the murderous German kobold want; Americans are better off discarding the European cultural heritage of cruelty and killing. Yet modern anomie, with its deification of technology, money, television, and narcotics, seems an unattractive alternative. And for some reason Gaiman chooses to present a slighting portrayal of Native American religious beliefs and cultural traditions. One is left with the overall impression that there is something terribly wrong with America, but that the author has no clear recommendation for what ought to be done about it. The idea of Old World gods leading a faded existence on American soil becomes Gaiman's vehicle for pointing out the ills of America. But pointing them out is all that he really does.

More than any of the post-1940 fiction writers considered thus far, Gaiman seems to be harking back to Howard's story 'The Grey God Passes'. For Pratt and De Kamp, the Æsir had been flawed — rather like the colonial powers of Britain and France in 1940 — but essentially noble and heroic, and certainly preferable to the brutal Frost-Giants. For Howard, Odin had been a cruel god who demanded human sacrifices, and his worshippers had been oppressors of the Irish. Gaiman too emphasizes Odin's cruelty and omits any mention of the Æsir's enemies, the *Jötnar*. From the perspective of Howard's protagonist Conn, the departure of Odin from Ireland is unequivocally a good thing; Gaiman equivocates, but in parts of *American Gods* he suggests that America would be better off without German kobolds and Mister Wednesday. Setting aside such questions, one is still left with the concept of the Æsir's mortality and their dependence on human worshippers for their existence. Howard's Odin had to leave Ireland when the Dublin Vikings who worshipped him were defeated; in Gaiman's novel, Odin's American avatar Mister Wednesday has dwindled to a being of little power, because he no longer has worshippers in America. If Mister Wednesday does not take preventive measures, he is in danger of ceasing to exist altogether. Howard's protagonist Conn hears Odin say 'even the gods must die'; Gaiman's protagonist Shadow hears a voice in a dream say, 'Gods die. And when they truly die they are unmourned and unremembered' (Gaiman 2001: 58–59). The Mediterranean region seems to have given

the ancient world the idea of a god who dies and is reborn (Mithras, Christ, et al.); Scandinavia seems to have given writers of modern fiction the idea of gods who are capable of permanent death — the chief Æsir.

With regard to the *Nachleben* of the Æsir in today's world, one twenty-first-century fantasy writer remains to be considered. In 2000, American novelist Jim Butcher began a series of novels known collectively as the Dresden Files. To date, fifteen novels and one collection of short stories have been published in this series. Their protagonist and first-person narrator is a wizard named Harry Dresden who lives in Chicago and earns his living as an investigator of supernatural phenomena. He must cope with a variety of uncanny menaces drawn from the myths and legends of the world: vampires, werewolves, Native American skinwalkers, and others. If any cultural tradition is more important than others in the Dresden Files novels, it is that of Ireland. The beings known in Irish tradition as the *sidhe*, powerful and capricious fairies, play a major role in this series of novels; Dresden's fairy godmother is a powerful being known as the Leanansidhe. In this fictional universe, most human beings are sceptics and tend to rationalize away whatever supernatural manifestations they may happen to witness, but lack of human believers has little or no effect on the continuation of these beings' existence. With a few exceptions, they are as comfortable, and as powerful, in Chicago as they are anywhere else in the world.

Native American skinwalkers are one exception: they have their full power only in the south-western states that are the traditional homes of the peoples (Navajo, Hopi and Zuni) who believe in their existence. If a skinwalker leaves the American south-west, its power diminishes, and it cannot long remain in the outside world. Most other supernatural beings in this fictional universe, however, seem to have no geographical or temporal limitations, and no need for humans to believe in them. They prefer secrecy so that they can operate freely, without human interference. Dresden's task is to protect humanity from supernatural dangers while maintaining this secrecy. He advertises in the Chicago Yellow Pages under the heading 'Wizard', but he realizes that most people will consider him to be either a charlatan or a stage magician. Only a handful of his human friends in Chicago are in on the secret, but Dresden is also in touch with a worldwide organization called the White Council of Wizards. Although the White Council from time to time fights against supernatural menaces — usually when the Council's existence is itself threatened — its members generally are less altruistic than Dresden is, and less concerned with humanity as a whole.

This overview of the Dresden Files is provided so that it will be clear that these novels do not focus on Norse mythology to any great extent. Nonetheless, the occasional appearance of supernatural beings from Norse tradition in these

novels is of interest for its relationship to the other works of fiction discussed already. Norse mythological beings are, along with skinwalkers, exceptional in this fictional universe. Unlike the Native American skinwalkers, the Norse beings can go as far away from their native ground as they wish, and spend as much time away as they wish to spend; however, in at least one instance full strength depends on a Scandinavian location. Lack of worshippers in today's world also seems to have diminished their strength. In the twenty-first century, Norse mythological beings must work for a living.

The first such being to appear in the Dresden Files is a tall blonde woman named Miss Gard who is an employee of a firm called Monoc Securities. Monoc Securities has a contract to provide security consultant services to a Chicago gangster named Johnny Marcone. As a criminal he is generally an adversary of Dresden's, but occasionally Dresden and Marcone find themselves working together against a common threat. Marcone is one of the few 'vanilla' humans — that is, people with no magical powers — who are aware of the existence of supernatural phenomena. He employs street thugs as bodyguards, but he also finds it advantageous to draw upon the special knowledge and skills of Miss Gard. Though in her first appearances — the 2006 novel *Dead Beat* and the 2007 novel *White Night* — her true identity was not revealed, in the 2007 short story 'Heorot' it is revealed that she is actually a valkyrie named Sigrun. The name of the firm that employees her, Monoc Securities, is obviously a shortening of the word 'monocle' and thus means 'one eye'. A single eye is its corporate logo and is, of course, also a reference to the one-eyed god Odin. Not until the twelfth installment in the series, the 2010 novel *Changes*, does Odin make an appearance in person.

Before that, the 2008 novel *Small Favor* had revealed some intriguing aspects of what it means to be a valkyrie in the twenty-first century. Because of her work for Marcone, Miss Gard spends most of her time in Chicago, yet she is a formidable fighter and an expert with numerous weapons. It is hard to see her as a being who has diminished in power because of geographical limitations. One wonders, though, why she must work for a gangster simply to make a living. Without her salary, would Miss Gard suffer for want of food and shelter? So far this question has not been answered. *Small Favor* makes it clear, though, that Miss Gard still has a valkyrie's traditional ability of knowing when a warrior is about to die. As the result of a deal struck between Marcone and Dresden, Miss Gard is aboard a helicopter that has flown to an island in Lake Michigan for the purpose of rescuing the wizard and some of his human friends from a dangerous situation. One of these friends is a latter-day crusader named Michael Carpenter, a sword-wielding armoured warrior who for years

has taken risks in battle against supernatural evils. When Michael is about to strap Dresden into a harness so that he can be hauled onto the hovering helicopter, Dresden as narrator states:

> I was about to take it, but by chance I looked up and saw Gard looking down at us through the Plexiglas bubble around the pilot's seat—looking at Michael with an absolute unnerving intensity that I had seen on her face once before, and my heart started hammering in terror.
>
> The last time she'd looked like that, I'd been in an alley outside Bock Ordered Books back in Chicago, and a necromancer named Corpsetaker and a ghoul named Li Xian had been about to murder me. A few minutes later Gard had told Marcone that she had seen that it was my fate to die then and there. The only reason that I survived was that Marcone had intervened.
>
> But even if I'd never seen that look on her face before, I figured that anytime a Valkyrie hovering over a battlefield suddenly gets real interested in a particular warrior, it ain't good. (Butcher 2008: 469)

Because of the look he sees on Miss Gard's face, Dresden insists that his friend Michael ascend first to the helicopter. But Dresden's attempt to circumvent Michael's fate is not altogether successful. While Michael is dangling in midair strapped into the harness, an enemy opens fire on him with a machine gun. Although Michael is not killed, he is severely wounded, permanently crippled, and his career as a warrior has come to an end. Since the Dresden Files novels take place in a world that is more or less the same as the one in which we live — with the addition of supernatural beings — one must wonder why it is that, with the number of wars raging at any given time and the number of warriors killed every day, a valkyrie would have time for any activity other than choosing the slain and transporting slain warriors to Valhalla. Evidently, though, this is no longer their job. Miss Gard can still recognize when a warrior is fated to die, but she comes upon such warriors only by chance, in the course of her job duties as a security consultant: she does not seek such warriors out.

Peculiar though this situation is, it is consistent with the portrayal of Odin himself in *Changes*. In the twenty-first century, the Allfather is the CEO of Monoc Securities, which is based in Oslo, Norway, and has a large, well-equipped office building as its corporate headquarters. Butcher, although a talented novelist, is not particularly good with foreign languages; the pseudonym he has invented for Odin is 'Donar Vadderung', which apparently is supposed to mean 'Thunder's Father'. Dresden takes it as a clue to Odin's real identity. When Dresden visits the Monoc Securities headquarters, he sees whole platoons of Einherjar, the slain warriors who traditionally inhabit Valhalla. But

in these novels, the Einherjar are not confined to Valhalla: they can re-enter the mortal world if they are willing to work as bodyguards and mercenary soldiers. In subsequent Dresden Files novels — *Ghost Story* (2011) and *Cold Days* (2012) — several Einherjar are shown working for Marcone in Chicago along with Miss Gard. When they first appear in the Monoc Securities headquarters in *Changes*, Miss Gard gives Dresden the explanation that they have been given a 'sip of renewed mortality' (Butcher 2010a: 155). Evidently, working as mercenaries in the mortal world is more satisfying for the Einherjar than eternal feasting and fighting in Valhalla — or else, perhaps, Odin in the twenty-first century is no longer able to entertain these warriors sumptuously in Valhalla. Possibly, in the fictional universe of the Dresden Files, Valhalla is no longer what it used to be. This point is unclear.

After glimpsing the Einherjar on his way to Odin's office in the Monoc Securities building, Dresden next sees two receptionists whose looks are quite striking:

> The women themselves were, apparently, identical twins. Both had raven-dark hair cut in close-fitting caps, and it matched the exact shade of their identical black suits. Both had dark eyes that sparkled with intensity and intelligence. They were both pale and their features were remarkable, if not precisely beautiful. They would stand out in any crowd, and not in an unpleasant way, either—but they would never be mistaken for cover models.
>
> The twins rose as the elevator doors opened, and their eyes looked very intent and very black as they stared at us. I've looked down the barrel of a gun before. This was like looking down four of them at once. They stood there, inhumanly motionless. Both wore headsets, but only one of them murmured into hers.
>
> I started to step out of the elevator, but Gard put out a cautionary hand. 'Don't until you're approved,' she said. 'They'll kill you. Maybe me, too.' (Butcher 2010a: 157)

Clearly Huginn and Muninn are still working for Odin, albeit in human guise. Instead of flying through the world to gather information for him, they remain at their desks and use computers for information-gathering. But do they perform their duties out of loyalty to Odin, or because they need to earn a salary to live?

As with Miss Gard, this question is never directly answered. But when Dresden speaks to Donar Vadderung in his office, the Monoc CEO explains some things about what has happened to the Norse mythological beings. Upon being asked by Dresden for help, 'Vadderung pursed his lips in thought. "In that, you may be disappointed. I am … not what I was. My children are scattered around the world. Most of them have forgotten our purpose. Once the

Jotuns retreated ...” He shook his head’ (Butcher 2010a: 162–63). Evidently, in this fictional universe, Ragnarök did not take place and will not take place; instead, the ‘Jotuns’ — Butcher’s Anglicization of Old Norse *Jötnar* — simply retreated, for some unexplained reason. With them went the original purpose the Æsir had had: to oppose the Jotuns. But the Norse gods’ power has also dissipated through lack of worshippers — an idea that by now is very familiar. Vadderung explains to Dresden that the Æsir and other ‘retired gods’ are ‘venerated by only a handful, the power of their blood spread out among thousands of offspring’ (Butcher 2010a: 163). Vadderung’s purpose is not only to explain to Dresden why he can be of little help: Vadderung also wants Dresden to know that in the crisis with which Dresden is currently dealing, his adversaries too are retired gods, malevolent ones from a different pantheon. Vadderung warns Dresden that although his adversaries have also diminished in power, ‘even the remnants of that power are more than you can face as you are.’ When Dresden expresses scepticism about that, Vadderung gives him a graphic demonstration of how much power even a retired god has:

> And a force like a hundred anvils smashed me out of the chair and to the floor.
>
> I found myself on my back, gasping like a landed fish. I struggled to move, to push myself up, but I couldn’t so much as lift my arms from the ground. I brought my will into focus, with the idea of using it to deflect some of that force from me and——and suddenly, sharply felt my will directly in contention with another. The power that held me down was not earth magic, as I had assumed it to be. It was the simple, raw, brute application of the will of Donar Vadderung, Thunder’s Father, the Father and King of the Aesir. Father Odin’s will held me pinned to the floor, and I could no more escape it or force it away than could an insect stop a shoe from descending.
>
> In the instant that realization came to me, the force vanished, evaporating as if it had never been. I lay on the floor gasping.
>
> ‘It is within my capabilities to kill you, young wizard,’ Vadderung said quietly. ‘I could wish you dead. Especially here, at the center of my power on Midgard.’ (Butcher 2010a: 163)

In Butcher’s conception, Odin’s power is greatest when he is in Scandinavia, and, although not as great as it once was, it is still formidable.

In *Changes*, Vadderung is friendly toward Dresden and, although he can provide little help other than information, he approves of the wizard’s purpose: to rescue an innocent girl from captivity in Mexico, where the servants of some ‘retired’ Aztec deities intend to use her as a human sacrifice. These are the malevolent deities whose power, Vadderung warns, vastly surpasses Dresden’s.

Odin here is portrayed as noble, the former opponent of the evil *Jötnar*. Óðinn's traditional involvement with human sacrifice goes unmentioned in this novel. In *Changes*, Vadderung is more or less benevolent: he disapproves of human sacrifice. Although his appearance as a businessman in a suit makes Vadderung somewhat similar to Gaiman's 'Mister Wednesday', the similarity is only superficial. Gaiman, like Howard before him, emphasized the cruelty and bloodthirstiness of Óðinn. Butcher's Vadderung is more or less aligned with the forces of goodness. Subsequently, in the 2012 novel *Cold Days* and again in the 2014 novel *Skin Game*, Vadderung comes to Chicago in person, disguised under another false identity, and surreptitiously helps Dresden ward off some supernatural disasters.

In the absence of the *Jötnar*, the Odin of this fictional universe has evidently found other purposes for his continued existence. Helping Harry Dresden is one of those purposes. But the goodness of Butcher's Odin is not absolute. One might question why Monoc Securities would supply its services to a crimelord. Throughout this series, Marcone more and more often finds himself helping Dresden and other good people — sometimes as a matter of simple survival, for Dresden's adversaries are often bent on wholesale destruction, and sometimes because Marcone has a sentimental streak where children are concerned. Because the wizard had told him that a child's life was in danger, the crimelord was willing to dispatch Miss Gard to Oslo as Dresden's escort to get help from Vadderung. Thus it could be argued that Butcher's Odin has a long-term perspective on questions of good and evil: perhaps this character can perceive that for the greater good, it is important that Marcone should survive and thrive. The other contracts that Monoc Securities fulfill have never been specified in the Dresden Files. One can speculate, though, that CEO Vadderung's interest in monetary profit is only secondary, and that he chooses jobs for Monoc that will always lead to an ultimately good outcome.

Though somewhat morally ambiguous, Butcher's Odin is nonetheless the most morally righteous Óðinn to appear in the works of fiction with which this study is concerned. Also unique to the Dresden Files is the complete absence of Ragnarök, either in the past or in time to come. The author of *Odds and Gods* arbitrarily decided to defy tradition by having Odin and Thor survive Ragnarök, but Holt did not ignore the tradition of Ragnarök as Butcher seems to be doing. In other respects — Butcher's use of the concept of limitations on the Æsir's power, limitations that are both geographical and temporal and are linked to the lack of worshippers in the twenty-first century — the Dresden Files are aligned with the fictions of Howard, the Pratt and De Camp team, Holt and Gaiman.

Though Vadderung tells Dresden in *Changes* that the deities of other pantheons have also declined in power, this basic concept appears to derive from the Old Norse tradition of gods with limitations — the same tradition that informed the works of Butcher's predecessors in the fantasy fiction of the last few decades. It is a concept that his predecessors bequeathed to Butcher. As Holt and Gaiman did, the American author of the Dresden Files has also extended the concept of limitations from the Norse pantheon to other pantheons, and not only the retired Aztec gods who appeared in *Changes*: in the most recent installment, *Skin Game* (2014), the Greek lord of the dead is described as powerful, majestic and busy still supervising numerous souls of long-deceased Hellenes, but the god Hades tells the novel's protagonist that few new souls have arrived in his underworld kingdom since belief in classical paganism faded away a millennium and a half ago. Though the Dresden Files have thus far withheld any explanation of why other supernatural beings such as the *sidhe* remain as powerful as they ever were, and why the *sidhe* are in no way 'retired', it is possible that in future installments this apparent inconsistency will be resolved. Without overemphasizing the importance of Norse mythology to the Dresden Files, one still can conclude that Donar Vadderung and Miss Gard are some of the most interesting characters in this series, and that Butcher, although he disregards the myth of Ragnarök per se, is considerably indebted to the conceptual lines of development we have been tracing from 'The Grey God Passes' to 'The Roaring Trumpet' and onward.

Underlying Archetypes

The first section of this study dealt with numerous authors. The last section will deal with only two,[11] one of whom was very prolific, and the other of whom has a special importance for twentieth-century fantasy fiction. J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973) is the author of special importance, and a discussion of Tolkien's use of Norse mythology will therefore conclude this study. As Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon and later as Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford, Tolkien had many other

[11] For the purposes of this study, Elizabeth Boyer's series of fantasy novels, known collectively as *World of the Alfar*, will be disregarded. Though they draw on the Eddas for plot-elements and for specialized vocabulary such as the word 'alfar,' the names of the characters have all been changed, the Scandinavian origins of the stories rendered unrecognizable. Boyer never seemed to have any purpose beyond light entertainment, and her novels went out of print soon after their publication in the 1980s. Their impact on the field was negligible.

demands on his time besides the writing of fantasy fiction and poetry; consequently, he could not write as voluminously as the American novelist Poul Anderson. A Minnesotan who later moved to the San Francisco area, Anderson made his living by writing science fiction and fantasy novels; he also wrote a non-fiction book, *Thermonuclear Warfare*. Anderson attended the University of Minnesota in the 1940s and earned a Bachelor's degree in engineering, but he did not proceed further in academia, nor did he work as an engineer, for he quickly found that he preferred writing as an occupation. Evidently Anderson was a remarkable autodidact. His knowledge of Scandinavian languages, history, legends and myths was formidable, and his knowledge of other cultural traditions was considerable. As the spelling of his Christian name 'Poul' suggests, Anderson was of Danish extraction, which explains his interest in Scandinavia, but few Scandinavian-Americans outside of academia are as knowledgeable about Scandinavia, especially medieval Scandinavia, as Anderson was.

Thus far, the writers considered in this study, other than Gaiman and Howard, have attracted little in the way of secondary criticism and commentary. Butcher, for example, has enthusiastic fans who post about the Dresden Files on the Internet, but these novels have not been subjected to literary analysis. Richard West, however, wrote an article on Poul Anderson's works entitled 'Medieval Borrowings in the Fiction of Poul Anderson' (West 1973). Having been written more than forty years ago, it is not up to date. Anderson had a long writing career, extending from the 1940s to the twenty-first century. His death occurred in 2001, and additional works by him were published posthumously. West's article is, however, a useful survey of Anderson's medieval borrowings during the first few decades of his writing career. The article discusses some Anderson works that deal with southern Europe in the Middle Ages but also some of his earlier works concerned with medieval Scandinavia: a short story called 'The Man Who Came Early' (1956), which is set in tenth-century Iceland and is informed by Anderson's reading of medieval sagas, and a fantasy novel called *The Broken Sword* (1954), which draws on several *fornaldarsögur*. Although *The Broken Sword* features some of the lesser entities of Norse mythology, such as dwarves, it is not primarily concerned with the mythic dimension of the *fornaldarsögur*, and 'The Man Who Came Early' is not mythological at all. It is a science fiction story in which time travel is the only story element requiring suspension of disbelief from readers; its depiction of tenth-century Iceland is quite realistic. These Anderson works are mentioned here merely for the purpose of indicating his knowledge of medieval sagas. To round out the overall picture of how Scandinavia figures into his total *oeuvre*, a few more Anderson works will be briefly mentioned: *The Last Viking* (1980–81), a tri-

logy of historical novels about the Norwegian king Haraldr Harðraði, which is quite realistic and contains nothing fantastical or mythological; a novel called *Mother of Kings* (2001) about King Eiríkr Bloodaxe's wife Gunnhildr, mostly historical in its approach but leavened by fantastical touches involving Gunnhildr's use of witchcraft;[12] a fantasy novel called *The Merman's Children* (1979), which is set during the Middle Ages, mostly in Eastern Europe, but with some scenes in the North Atlantic involving the selkies of Scandinavian legend; and a novelistic retelling of *Hrólfs saga kraka*, entitled *Hrolf Kraki's Saga* (1977).

Anderson's science fiction novella 'The Sorrow of Odin the Goth' (1991 [1983]) does require some comment. Contrary to its title, this novella is not at all mythological and does not actually feature Odin as a character. Rather, it involves futuristic speculation about the possibility of time-travel devices. Time-travel technology enables a scholar, a philologist interested in the Gothic language and the history of the Gothic tribes, to visit the Dnieper region in the fourth century AD so that he can observe first-hand what the Ostrogoths were actually like. Although he did not intend to masquerade as Odin, the philologist's tall stature, his radiant cleanliness and his mysterious appearance without a horse and without any visible wear-and-tear from long-distance walking combine to give the Goths the idea that he must be 'the Wanderer'. As a precaution the philologist had also armed himself with a spear, Odin's traditional weapon, and for the Goths this clinches the matter. The philologist, Farness, takes advantage of the Goths' superstitious misapprehensions about him, so that he is able to make time-jumps and visit them over the course of the fourth century, and over several generations, without arousing suspicion. The Goths are not surprised at the absence of visible aging in their supposedly divine visitor. Through advanced weapons technology, Farness is able to help the Goths against their enemies, and his weapons too are imputed to his godly powers.

In this novella, Anderson displays a sophisticated understanding of Indo-European linguistics, fourth-century history and the evolution of Germanic myths. Farness's impersonation of 'the Wanderer' does not include features, such as one empty eye-socket, that are typical of the Óðinn whom Scandinavian writers depicted in the later Middle Ages. Anderson speculates knowledgeably about which features of the mythical Odin developed earliest and were common to all the Germanic peoples, and which features developed later and

[12] It should be noted that I helped Anderson with the research for this novel (see the Acknowledgements at the beginning of *Mother of Kings*); though I never met him in person, I corresponded with Anderson in the 1990s.

were unique to Scandinavia. William Morris's poetic phrase 'Odin the Goth' was rather odd, since Odin did not particularly belong to the Gothic peoples. Possibly the Danish-American writer, having read Morris's poetry and mulled over this phrase, was inspired to create a pseudo-Odin who indeed had a special connection with the Goths. I never asked Anderson about this during his lifetime, and now it is too late.

Anderson wrote one fantasy novel, *War of the Gods* (1997), in which the Æsir appear as characters. Their appearance is too brief to warrant inclusion of *War of the Gods* in the previous section of this study. This novel is a retelling of the story of Hadingus from Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, and, contrary to its title, it is mostly concerned with the doings of the human Hadingus. Giants, of course, enter into the story, but the Æsir appear only in the first and last chapters. In the interests of brevity, *War of the Gods* will receive no further discussion here. For present purposes, the Anderson novel that most merits analysis is his 1983 science fiction novel *Orion Shall Rise*, which is covertly structured around the myth of Ragnarök, although the novel's plot overtly concerns human society in the future. Two academic articles concerning *Orion Shall Rise* are in existence, and one of them (Brians 1987) is quite perceptive about Anderson's handling of futuristic speculation about nuclear war, but neither that article nor the other one (Prosser 1987, which in all respects is negligible) brings up the underlying archetypes in this novel. To perceive them, a reader needs to know Norse mythology.

As a science fiction writer Anderson had two special interests: the impact of full-scale nuclear war should it ever occur, and the possibilities of space travel. These interests combine in Anderson's *Orion Shall Rise*. The novel takes place at an unspecified time in the future, several centuries after a devastating global nuclear war. Some surviving remnants of humanity have regained a certain degree of civilization. Most powerful are the Maurai, based in New Zealand, a seafaring people with a passionate concern for the conservation of natural resources and a firm resolve that nuclear radiation must never again threaten the world in any way. In their ships they rove the oceans of the world, forcibly insisting that other peoples conserve resources and live in an ecologically sustainable way. The Maurai also prevent other peoples from using fissionable materials, even for non-military purposes, because the Maurai believe that even the peaceful generation of nuclear power would inevitably lead to the splitting of the atom for military purposes. Another technologically advanced people are the French 'Aerogens', who take their name from their continued use of a suborbital platform dating from pre-disaster times. Through luck, France was not ravaged by nuclear war as badly as some other countries, and it was able to

maintain a technological base so that flights to and from the suborbital platform could continue and the platform itself could be continuously repaired and maintained. The intended purpose of the suborbital platform is weather forecasting and control, but it also has the potential to be a formidable weapon, for the platform is dirigible and can be taken anywhere on earth; moreover, it wields lasers for the purpose of weather control, but the lasers have destructive potential.

The Aerogens agree with the Maurai that fissionable materials must never be used for any purpose; indeed, some of the Aerogens are more radical than the Maurai, for the Aerogens have been exposed to a new religion called 'Gaeanity' which involves worship of Mother Earth. Gaeans are leery of technology, though they do not eschew its use altogether. In this fictional future, the people most reckless about the use of technology are the 'Norries', the people of the Northwest Union, which essentially consists of Alaska, parts of western Canada, and what was once Washington State. The Norries burn coal and participate in other harmful activities on which the Maurai frown. Twenty years prior to the events of this novel, the Maurai had won a war against the Norries, with the consequence that Maurai officials have the right to go anywhere in the Northwest Union and oversee what the Norries are up to; a Maurai High Commissioner supervises the Northwest Union. The Maurai also investigate Norrie travellers who visit other parts of the world. There is constant friction between the Maurai and the Norries.

For all of Earth's peoples except the Norries, any attempt to quarry uranium or to salvage fissionable materials left over from the pre-disaster era is the deepest of all taboos; the very idea of it inspires horror. The novel begins with an attempt by the Norries to recover some pre-disaster plutonium, with Maurai intelligence agents hot on their heels. A non-Gaean French aircraft pilot and an Englishman named Plik accidentally become involved in this conflict. The two Norries involved in the attempt at plutonium salvaging are a man named Mikli and a woman named Ronica; the latter is a sympathetic character whose motives are noble, for she has been told that the Norries want plutonium only to develop space-travel capabilities. She believes that her people would never use the plutonium for atomic weapons, nor would they ever make military use of spaceships. She has been fooled by Mikli, whom several other characters, more intuitive than Ronica, describe as 'evil' from the moment they meet him. Mikli is indeed evil, for from the very beginning his interest has been in acquiring nuclear weapons and making use of spaceships to conquer the other peoples of the world. A deceiver of his own people who cares only about personal power for himself, he is modelled on the mythological character Loki, who betrays the

Æsir and fights on the side of the giants in the battle of Ragnarök. Like Loki, Mikli enjoys 'havoc' for its own sake (Anderson 1983: 422); when asked why he is pursuing such a destructive goal, he says 'It is in the nature of man that he fouls his own nest', adding 'It's the liveliest game in town [...] and it should lead to some glorious fireworks' (Anderson 1983: 338).

If Mikli were merely a sociopath and a traitor who delights in causing widespread destruction, that would not be enough to identify him with Loki, nor would it be enough to identify his destructive rampage with Ragnarök. At several places in the novel, however, Anderson tips his hand. One of the Maurai who are pursuing Ronica and Mikli, an agent named Wairoa, is the product of genetic engineering; the Maurai excel at biological sciences, and they had briefly experimented with the cultivation of specific traits through gene-splicing. Wairoa is abnormally tall, physically powerful, and intellectually formidable because of the genes that have combined to create him:

> The donor-parents were chosen for chromosomes that the researchers thought could be selected from to make an interesting, visible hybrid in which the interplay of heredities would be reasonably clear. They were a Sinese, a black Stralian, a white Merican, and a Maurai. Although he was then in his teens, the Maurai was Ruori Haakonu, Arututu's son, who grew up to become High Commissioner in the Northwest Union [...] The woman who carried the child to term was also Maurai, a scientist on the island. Thus Wairoa had two fathers and three mothers.
>
> *Or nine mothers, he remarked to me when we talked about it for a couple of minutes in Wellantoa* [Wellington, New Zealand]*—because they raised the children communally, but his fosterer and six other women took the most care of him* (Anderson 1983: 134; the sentence in italics represents the thoughts of another character).

In Norse mythology, the god who is a child of nine mothers is, of course, Heimdallr. Wairoa also has golden skin, and Heimdallr was called 'Golden One' in Fletcher's and Pratt's 'The Roaring Trumpet', perhaps because he had been called the white or shining god by Snorri Sturluson, in addition to receiving the sobriquet *Gullintanni* ('Golden tooth') in one skaldic poem. Anderson's description of Wairoa's skin colour as golden is informed by the novelist's familiarity with medieval Scandinavian writings and with 'The Roaring Trumpet.'

At the end of the novel, Wairoa kills the evil Mikli and dies in the attempt. In Norse mythology, 'Loki was an old enemy of Heimdall, and Snorri brings them together once more' at the battle of Ragnarök (Ellis Davidson 1964: 206). The conflict in which Mikli and Wairoa die, along with a multitude of other people — for Mikli has succeeded in unleashing nuclear weapons — can aptly be compared to Ragnarök. Not only are nuclear weapons involved, but also the

Aerogens have reacted to the Norrie weapons by flying their suborbital platform to the Northwest Union and using their lasers against the Norries.

Mikli's and Wairoa's personal traits are not the only allusions to Norse mythology in this novel. The Maurai High Commissioner Ruori Haakonu, mentioned above as a donor of genetic material to Wairoa, had been assassinated by the Norries prior to the events in this novel. Speaking confidentially to a Norrie government official, Mikli boasts about having masterminded the assassination, whereupon the official responds, 'It was an accidental death, wasn't it? A fete, an archery contest, a blind man who wanted to try under guidance but misheard the instructions—' (Anderson 1983: 60). This incident replicates the ostensibly accidental killing of Baldr by the blind god Höðr, who was innocent of any lethal intent but had been manipulated by Loki. Once again, Mikli plays the Loki role in the events of *Orion Shall Rise*. Callously, Mikli remarks that Ruori Haakonu 'had to go'.

Several of the characters in this novel have good scientific educations, but only Plik, the Englishman, is knowledgeable about ancient literature. He is also the most intuitive character in the novel. Halfway through it, when the crisis has not yet come to a boil but the Maurai and the Aerogens are clearly headed for a clash against the plutonium-gathering Norries, Plik remarks, 'What I feel upon us is a gigantic conflict of [...] mystiques — a conflict so deep-going that human beings and whole civilizations are turning themselves willy-nilly into archetypes and reenacting immemorially ancient myths — for only myth and music can even hint at such truths' (Anderson 1983: 269). Here Anderson is issuing readers with a blatant invitation to read his novel in mythic terms. Elsewhere too, this character is the spokesman whom Anderson employs to hint broadly that the conflict in this novel is comparable to Ragnarök:

> Plik startled the company by speaking for the first time.
>
> 'Oh, yes,' he said around pipe and wineglass. His tone was almost calm. 'Your proper business. To raise the Old Serpent and bring about the end of the world.'
>
> Ronica gave him a hard glance. 'No', she said. 'If anything, to save the world.'
>
> 'Not as men have known it,' Plik replied. 'Including you, my dear; "man" embraces "woman." No, the gods are doomed—everybody's gods—and what new ones will come striding through their ashes, we shall not live to understand.' (Anderson 1983: 315)

'To raise the Old Serpent' is Plik's way of describing the redevelopment of nuclear weapons. He is familiar with Norse mythology, and he therefore can knowingly allude to the myth of the Miðgarðr Serpent which wreaks destruc-

tion in the battle of Ragnarök. Plik abhors what Mikli is doing, but like the seeress in *Völuspá* he also expresses some hope for the future: new gods — that is, a new kind of human society — will arise from the ashes of the old. Like Ragnarök, the conflict in this novel is hideously destructive, yet the destruction is not total. Wairoa's killing of Mikli ameliorates the situation; more importantly, Ronica and the French aircraft pilot save the remnants of humanity by seizing control of the Norrie prototype spaceship 'Orion', flying it beyond earth's atmosphere, and sending radio messages to everyone on earth. The radio messages insist on a cessation of hostilities, for the spaceship is armed with weapons that will enable Ronica and the Frenchman to enforce peace.

Although Anderson portrays Mikli/Loki as utterly evil, the novelist is not unsympathetic to the Norries' ambition to build spaceships and to make nonmilitary use of nuclear power. In numerous other novels, Anderson had already made it clear that he personally believed mankind's future lay in outer space. Anderson was not as averse to the use of nuclear power as his Maurai characters are. In the dialogue he writes for them, the Maurai position is eloquently expressed, and for many readers will be wholly convincing. At this point, I cannot forbear from interjecting some personal comments, which may be of interest for the evidence they give regarding the effectiveness of Anderson's use of Norse mythological archetypes in this novel.

I view the Maurai as the only rational characters in the novel, for the Gaeans are too mystical about Mother Earth, and the Norries—not only Mikli, but even the best of the Norries—are too heedless of the need for ecological sustainability. The Maurai, to me, represent a practical compromise between the two extremes of the Gaeans and the Norries. But Anderson makes it clear in this novel that the Maurai can be seen as too dictatorial. He makes a case for the Norries: they are chafing under Maurai tyranny, and they cannot be expected to restrict themselves to the austere way of life that the Maurai advocate. At the end of the novel when Ronica and the Frenchman are sending radio messages to the peoples of Earth, they not only lecture the Norries about how bad their acceptance of Mikli's use of nuclear weapons was, they also tell the Maurai that they must stop trying to control the Northwest Union. Space travel and the use of nuclear power by the Norries, if not by the other peoples of Earth, will continue, no matter what the Maurai want. Despite Mikli's hideous misuse of nuclear power, which Anderson vividly depicts in this novel, the author seems to be suggesting that the splitting of the atom cannot be prevented, and therefore mankind might as well make the most of it. Various readers may lean toward the Maurai position, as I do, or even toward the Gaean position, which the author also expounds eloquently, but for Anderson the protagonists of

Orion Shall Rise are the Norrie woman, Ronica, and the non-Gaean Frenchman who pilots the spaceship. At the end of the novel, though multitudes of people have died horribly and the level of radiation throughout the world has risen, Anderson gives what he considers to be a happy ending. Readers, of course, are free to disagree with him. I am one who disagrees. The parallel he draws between Ragnarök and Mikli's unleashing of nuclear weapons is all too convincing to me, and utterly horrifying. The hopefulness of the post-Ragnarök situation in *Orion Shall Rise* lacks conviction for this reader. In addition to Anderson's graphic descriptions of nuclear devastation, his use of mythological allusions to underscore the novel's destructive conflict is so vivid that it makes me recoil in disgust, and confirms me in my own Mauraiesque beliefs about the necessity of caution in using technology.

This is a caution shared by J. R. R. Tolkien and his friend C. S. Lewis. Anderson, the engineering student, was a technophile; Lewis and Tolkien strongly objected to the spoliation of the natural wilderness, and they had an equally deep aversion to weapons technology. It is perhaps no accident that Anderson was an agnostic while Lewis and Tolkien were both devout Christians. At this point it is worth mentioning that Lewis's interest in Norse mythology, which he describes in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, enters into his fiction when the evil chief of the secret police in his profoundly Christian children's fantasy novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* turns out to be a wolf named Fenris Ulf; Fenrir, of course, is the hideous wolf who does so much damage in the myth of Ragnarök.[13] Lewis and Tolkien shared many of the same religious beliefs and ethical convictions, but Tolkien's use of Norse mythology in his fiction was much more extensive; consequently he will be the focus of discussion from this point onward.[14] The Ents in *The Lord of the Rings* express Tolkien's views on the importance of preserving the wilderness,

[13] Lewis's original name for this character was 'Maugrim', but the earliest American editions of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* substitute the name 'Fenris Ulf'. The name 'Maugrim' has been restored in more recent American editions; see Schakel (2005: 14). My own speculation is that 'Maugrim' is probably Lewis's attempt at a pun, 'maw grim', that is, 'grim maw' — an appropriate description of a wolf, but one lacking in mythic resonance.

[14] Unlike the other authors included in this study, Lewis and Tolkien have been the object of intensive critical scrutiny. Secondary scholarship on these two writers and on other members of Oxford's 'Inklings' circle is so vast that an exhaustive listing is impractical; however, the most important work has been done by Tom Shippey, to whom I am deeply indebted for the ensuing discussion of Tolkien in this study. Those curious to know more about Lewis, Tolkien and the Inklings should consult Shippey's books on Tolkien, especially *The Road to Middle Earth* (1992). It should be pointed out that, because of doctrinal differences, the Tolkien/

and in *The Hobbit* the narrator pointedly suggests that the most evil characters in the story — the Goblins, or Orcs — were the clever technocrats who, before our own era, were originally responsible for devising weapons capable of killing large numbers of people at a time (Tolkien 1937: 60). During World War II, Tolkien's letters to his son Christopher, who was serving as an RAF pilot, express grave misgivings about the ethical acceptability of deploying bomber planes against the Axis forces (Tolkien 1981: 88, 115). Anderson would have said that such ethical squeamishness was sheer madness.

In connection with the themes of Anderson's *Orion Shall Rise*, a Tolkien letter dated 9 August 1945 is of special interest:

> The news today about 'Atomic bombs' is so horrifying one is stunned. The utter folly of these lunatic physicists to consent to do such work for war-purposes: calmly plotting the destruction of the world! Such explosives in men's hands, while their moral and intellectual status is declining, is about as useful as giving out firearms to all inmates of a gaol. (Tolkien 1981: 116)

Anderson's optimism about people's ability to handle fissionable materials responsibly, with Mikli as a rare exception, would have seemed sheer madness to Tolkien. The only thing Anderson and Tolkien really had in common was an interest in Norse mythology and in Germanic languages. To a remarkable extent, these two writers are at cross-purposes in their use of Norse mythology.

So extensive was Tolkien's use of Norse mythology that the ensuing discussion will be more of a survey than an analysis. Tolkien's first contact with Old Norse myth and legend came through the pages of Andrew Lang's *Red Fairy Book* (1890), in which Lang included his own very abbreviated account of 'The Story of Sigurd'. Tolkien, then, in early childhood, was impressed by Sigurd but even more by 'the nameless North' 'and the prince of all dragons', as Tolkien put it in a lecture he gave in 1939, which later appeared in his collected essays (Tolkien 1983: 188). In a personal communication, Tolkien's former student Tom Shippey tells me that as a teenager, Tolkien on 17 February 1911 had read a paper on the Norse sagas at his school, King Edward's, in Birmingham, and that according to pages 20–21 of the March 1911 report in *The King Edward's School Chronicle*, the young Tolkien spoke of the saga of the Volsungs as showing 'the highest epic genius', and concluded that 'there is no scene in Homer like the final tragedy of Sigurd and Brynhild'. In later years Tolkien was to

Lewis friendship eventually cooled: Tolkien, a life-long Roman Catholic, was disappointed when Lewis's adherence to the Church of England could not be swayed. What the two men shared in common was considerable but must not be overstated.

modify this opinion without ever really abandoning it. It is now public knowledge that during the 1930s he spent much time and effort in writing his own version of the legend of Sigurd and Gudrun, in an attempt to harmonize and rectify the flaws or gaps in that saga and also in the other four ancient versions of the legend: the poems of the Poetic Edda, Snorri Sturluson's Prose *Edda*, *Þiðreks saga* and the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*. By this time, his son Christopher reports, his father was much more critical of the anonymous author of *Völsunga saga*, without changing his opinion of the intrinsic power and interest of the material (Tolkien 2009: 39). His much greater knowledge of Old Norse is also shown by allusions in *Sigurd and Gudrun* to the poem 'The Battle of the Goths and Huns', preserved in the *fornaldarsaga Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, edited and translated by Tolkien's son Christopher in 1960 as *The Saga of King Heiðrek the Wise*.

Tolkien had absorbed many other influences from Old Norse literature even earlier. Already in his time as an Oxford undergraduate he was beginning to construct what would become his own mythology, in which Old Norse elements figure strongly (see Garth 2003). His description of the Valar — the demigods or demiurges of his mythology — in *The Silmarillion* echoes Snorri Sturluson's description of the Æsir in the prose *Edda*. The resemblance between Snorri's Týr and *The Silmarillion*'s Tulkas is especially strong (Tolkien 1977: 28–29) while the 'grim hall' of the warrior-Vala Makar on pages 77–78 of *The Book of Lost Tales Part One*, with its incessant fighting and feasting, is clearly a version of Valhalla.[15] Other Old Norse legends or motifs which Tolkien retained from the very beginnings of his mythology include the chaining of Melko on pages 103–04 of *The Book of Lost Tales Part One*, which is comparable to the chaining of Loki in Snorri's *Edda*; Beren's loss of a hand to the great wolf Karkaras (Tolkien 1984: 34), which is comparable to Týr and Fenrir; Turin's ill-fated adoption of the Dragon-helm, which has the moral ambiguity of Sigurðr's *ægishjálmr* ('helmet of terror') in *Völsunga saga*; Turin's slaying of the great dragon Glorund (Tolkien 1984: 108–09), which is comparable to Sigurðr's slaying of Fáfnir; and the fate befalling the necklace made for King Tinwelint by the dwarves (Tolkien 1984, 228) which is comparable to the *Brisingamen* in Norse mythology. Tolkien changed names and details in these stories all his life, but always kept the central motifs intact.

[15] *The Book of Lost Tales Part One* was published by Allen & Unwin in 1983, and is not the only Tolkien publication from that year. To disambiguate them, *The Book of Lost Tales Part One* will not be referred to parenthetically as 'Tolkien 1983'; in this study 'Tolkien 1983' refers to Tolkien's collected essays ('The Monsters and the Critics' et al.).

There may, furthermore, have been less apparent but even more important debts to Norse mythology in his imagination. The most important element in all of Tolkien's fiction — with the exception of the wholly original hobbits — is his new interpretation of the many North-European traditions of the elves: in Tolkien, they are the First-Born, a race superior to humanity in strength, skills and intelligence, and also, if not immortal, then potentially so. Aspects of later folk-tale form part of the nature of Tolkien's elves, but possibly a vital part comes not from folk-tale but once again from Snorri's *Edda*, and even more from learned theorizing about apparent contradictions in Snorri's account. Snorri seems to indicate several groups of elves, 'light-elves', 'swart-elves' and 'dark-elves', although 'swart' and 'dark' (*svart-* and *døkk-* in Old Norse) are synonymous and are thus unlikely to refer to separate classes of beings. The 'swart-elves' (*svartalfar*), however, appear to be another name for the dwarves. How, then, are the different groups to be understood? Tolkien would almost certainly have known the attempt to solve the problem by Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie*, and would almost as certainly have disapproved of it. Tolkien's breakthrough was to say that for himself as a fantasy novelist, the light/dark distinction had nothing to do with skin-colour. Instead, in Tolkien's own mythology the 'light-elves' were those who had seen the light, the light of the Two Trees in Aman before that light was extinguished; the 'dark-elves' were those who had stayed behind in Middle-earth, and accordingly never quite caught up with their braver and more civilized cousins (Shippey 2004: 7–22). In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien also constructed an entire story to explain how the Dark Elf Eol, with his black armour, might have been associated with and mistaken for a dwarf, giving rise to a garbled story which eventually became Snorri's (Shippey 2004: 11).

Tolkien first expressed this idea publicly, in allusive form, in Chapter 8 of *The Hobbit*, but *The Hobbit* as published owes several other debts to Norse mythology, and once again to learned commentary. All but one of the names of Tolkien's many dwarves are taken from the *Dvergatal* ('List of Dwarves') in *Völuspá*, as are the name of Gandalf the wizard and Thorin's nickname 'Oakenshield' (Shippey 2000: 15–17; Atherton 2012: 21–23). Tolkien stated that the dragon-name Smaug was 'the past tense of the [P]rimitive Germanic verb Smugan' (Tolkien 1983: 31), but it is also the past tense of the Old Norse verb *smjúga* ('to creep through an opening') and the exact cognate of the first element of the Old English noun *smeah-wyrm* ('creeping-worm'), which has a bearing on Gollum's real name Sméagol (Shippey 1992: 89). Quite likely the exact nature of Smaug depends on Tolkien's consideration of all these connections, and more. Smaug's conversation with Bilbo is also clearly modelled on Sigurðr's

conversation with the dying Fáfnir in the eddic poem *Fáfnismál*. Other probable Old Norse borrowings in *The Hobbit* include Beorn the were-bear, whose name is Old English but who resembles Böðvarr Bjarki from *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and whose name was in an earlier unpublished version Medwed — that is, Russian *medved* ('honey-eater'), a taboo-name for the bear, which Tolkien acquired from R. W. Chambers's *Introduction to Beowulf* (see Anderson 2006: 141–343).

This last example brings up what one might call Tolkien's somewhat 'conflicted' relationship to Norse mythology. He was an English patriot and furthermore was deeply attached to his home county of Worcestershire, in the south-west Midlands, which during the Viking period was one of the areas of England least affected by Scandinavian cultural influence. In a personal communication Tom Shippey speculates to me that Tolkien might well have preferred Modern English to be descended, not from East Midland dialects, still less from an Eastern Anglo-Danish 'creole' or 'mixed language' — as one theory would have it — but rather from the West Mercian dialect of the *Ancrene Wisse* ('Guidance for Anchoresses'), a Middle English text from Herefordshire which he studied for many years and published in a scholarly edition (Tolkien 1962). Shippey points out that Tolkien's friend and collaborator E. V. Gordon enthusiastically declared that the language of *Ancrene Wisse* and its associated texts was 'a good form of language, neater, more careful, and weightier than the English we have now. It is the chief attraction of this group [of early Middle English texts] that it preserves the pure tradition of Anglo-Saxon England' (Gordon 1936: 135–36). Tolkien was himself most anxious to 'preserve the pure tradition' of England and knew well that the Old Norse language, while cognate, was markedly different — linguistically and aesthetically — from Old English. He also never forgot that many extant Old Norse texts are overtly pagan in content, whereas Christian content predominates in most of the extant Old English texts. Old Norse was, however, much better preserved than Old English and offered a tap-root into what had once been a shared tradition of myth and legend — such would have been Tolkien's view, for his views were formed early in the twentieth century, when the nineteenth-century idea that the Germanic languages shared a common mythology, if only those of the non-Norse languages had preserved it, was still influential. Old Norse mythology could not be ignored; it was even highly valued — but in some ways, for Tolkien, its pagan and non-English content had to be defused, that is, transformed into something more compatible with his own Christian beliefs and with the Englishness he cherished.

In his fantasy fiction Tolkien adopted several 'defusing' devices (Shippey 2007a). On occasion he transposed Old Norse terms into their Old English

cognates, so that on page 245 of *The Book of Lost Tales Part One* Snorri's *Askr* ('Ash[tree]') becomes the Old English cognate Æsc. The very start of his mythological inventions is said to have been a fascination with the strange Old English word *ēarendel* ('dawn, morning star') (see Shippey 2000: 257), but the story that Tolkien developed from this word, about the elf Earendil, owes something to Snorri's story of the god Þórr and the mythological character Aurvandill, whose name is exactly cognate with *ēarendel*. Tolkien also located his myth-bearer Ottor—a name intermediate between Old Norse Óttarr and Old English Ohthere—in the Proto-Germanic past, before Old English and Old Norse became clearly distinct (Shippey 2007b: 335–36). He records that a later myth-bearer, the Anglo-Saxon Ælfwine, had once been a slave of the Norseman Orm and had no reason to love him, but recognized nevertheless that there were no bolder seamen than the Norse (Tolkien 1984: 318). In the published version of his BBC radio play 'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son' (1953) Tolkien put words from the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon* into the mouths of the Norse warriors rather than the English, as in the poem, because of his disapproval of their sentiment. In the Old English poem, English defenders who were consciously Christian had been the speakers who expressed that 'theory of courage and unalterable will' which Tolkien had praised years earlier, but which he now viewed as more properly characteristic of a desperate and hopeless heathenism (see Shippey 2007b).

It has been argued that Tolkien became increasingly nervous in later life about his apparent readiness to compromise with or even recreate a heathen mythology, so that he back-pedalled on his images, for instance, of the afterlife (Hutton 2003: 235–37). One of the ways in which Tolkien parted company with his former friend Lewis was that Lewis had no hesitation about incorporating images from various pagan mythologies — Fenris Ulf is only one example, and Lewis especially drew upon Greco-Roman mythology, which Tolkien disliked — in his children's fantasy novels *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and its sequels. Lewis trusted that the Christian underpinnings of these novels would shine through; Tolkien found this a worrisome problem.

Even so, Tolkien remained fascinated by Old Norse images and poems, and continued to owe a great debt to them. Seemingly as late as 1965 he wrote a Numenor story, 'Aldarion and Erendis', eventually published posthumously (Tolkien 2001: 173–212), which reprises Snorri's tale of the failed marriage of the god Njörðr and the giantess Skaði. Much more importantly, his slow and halting writing of *The Lord of the Rings* seems to have been given fresh life by his solution of a linguistic consistency problem inherited from *The Hobbit*. How, logically, could dwarves have Old Norse names, in a world which appeared to

speak standard English? The author's solution (Tolkien 1989: 424) was to let standard English represent the Common Tongue of Middle-Earth, in which case Old English could then correspond to the archaic language still spoken by the Riders of Rohan but could still have observable connections to the somewhat archaic form of the Common Tongue spoken by hobbits. Old Norse could then correspond to a language once spoken by humans on the eastern side of the Misty Mountains, and adopted by dwarves as a lingua franca when dealing with other peoples, in addition to their own secret language which the dwarves used only among themselves. This linguistic solution immediately freed Tolkien to create the Riders, and the whole set of contrasts between Rohan and Gondor which energizes much of the second and third volumes of the trilogy.

Tolkien's influence on later fantasy writers is impossible to overestimate. His image of the 'lower mythology' of elves and dwarves, orcs and trolls, ents and dragons has become hegemonic. Even writers determined — as nearly all are — to assert their own vision are aware of Tolkien and are in some sense in dialogue with him. Poul Anderson, for one, certainly knew Tolkien's fiction, though Anderson disagreed with Tolkien ideologically. In the Afterword of every Dresden Files novel Jim Butcher specifically mentions his indebtedness to Tolkien, and Butcher is closer to Tolkien ideologically: although Butcher's protagonist Harry Dresden shies away from organized religion, Dresden is constantly fighting moral battles against external foes and also against himself. In almost every installment of the Dresden Files, when speaking to other characters Dresden has occasion to quote Gandalf's words about the terrible temptation that the Ring of Power can exert upon a wizard. The fictional character Dresden lives in a twenty-first century world more or less like our own, in which Tolkien is an extremely popular author; Dresden reads Tolkien's fiction and can quote from it by heart.

Through Tolkien, Old Norse myth, legend and folk-tale have been passed on, as words, names and images, without necessarily being identified or recognized as such by readers. His works have familiarized millions of readers not only with the inhabitants of his fantasy world but also with the Old Norse placenames of locations in that world: pathless Mirkwood (*Myrkviðr inn ókunni*, 'the unknown Dark Forest'), the Misty Mountains (the *úrig fjöll*, 'mountains shimmering with moisture' of the eddic poem *Skírnismál*), and Middle-Earth itself (*Miðgarðr*). Of all the writers included in this study, only Tolkien ranges extensively beyond the myth of Ragnarök to draw upon other aspects of Norse mythology that are of equal importance to him. In this respect Anderson comes closest to Tolkien, for in his novel *War of the Gods* Anderson reshapes Saxo's story of Hadingus, which has no close connection with Ragnarök, and

in *The Merman's Children* he includes Scandinavian selkies, which have no connection whatsoever with Ragnarök. The awareness of Norse mythology that he displays in 'The Sorrow of Odin the Goth' also extends far beyond the myth of Ragnarök. But even Anderson settled on Ragnarök — Ragnarök exclusively — as the underlying template for his most important reworking of Norse mythology, the science-fiction novel *Orion Shall Rise*.

Previously we saw that the downfall of the Æsir in the battle of Ragnarök and/or the shocking idea associated with their downfall — the idea that gods can die, and die permanently, never to be reborn — has exerted a powerful fascination upon numerous science fiction and fantasy novelists from 1940 onward. The writers in question apply this idea to works of fiction that, in various ways, are meaningful to the preoccupations of their lives—preoccupations stretching from the undecided (as of 1940) outcome of the Second World War to the malaise afflicting twenty-first-century American society. The myriad ways in which Norse mythology provided underlying archetypes for Tolkien's fantasy fiction are unique. Though the reasons for his immense success are many, Tolkien's use of Norse mythology can be credited as one reason for his success. That *The Lord of the Rings* is, for millions of readers, the most important book of the twentieth century accentuates the ability (*inter alia*) that Norse mythology still has to captivate readers, and its applicability to twentieth- and twenty-first-century concerns.

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6.3.1 – Norse Medievalism in Children's Literature in English

David Clark

Introduction

This chapter explores the different ways in which children's literature, broadly conceived as literature that anticipates or enjoys a large audience of non-adults, has transmitted or reworked Old Norse mythology, history and culture. The texts which comprise this category fall into three broad groupings: Retellings of Norse texts, Historical Fiction and Fantasy.[1] Relatively little work has been done on the various medievalist reworkings of Norse material in children's literature, and almost nothing has been written on novels of the last twenty-five years. Therefore the main focus here is on the most recent and most neglected material. However, that material must be contextualized within a brief overview of Norse medievalism and scholarship in the field, beginning with the pre-twentieth-century period. This historical overview is then followed by a discussion of genre and categorization, since there is a major shift of approach and style in the mid-twentieth century.[2]

[1] Ignored here are the many histories for children and 'edu-tainment' titles such as Deary (1994) in the *Horrible Histories* series; novelizations and screenplays of Norse-inspired films which enjoy a large non-adult audience; and children's novels which contain 'empty' Norse content, such as Ferguson (2003), which merely uses the name Odin.

[2] For a broad history of the wider genre, see Hunt (1994).

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The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume II: From c. 1830 to the Present, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 367–400
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.115708

The Vikings and the Victorians

In his massive and minutely researched volume *The Vikings and the Victorians* (2000), Andrew Wawn shows that both medieval research and medievalism in fiction were used in the nineteenth century to support or challenge both sexual and political orthodoxy and Victorian family values. There was a widespread perception of the so-called 'saga virtues' as comprising strength and physical skills, masculinity, independence and democratic principles for adults as well as for adolescents and children.

Wawn does not explicitly study the intended and actual audiences for his texts, and indeed the data must be scarce, but he does demonstrate that the Victorians produced several reworkings of Norse material for children, from Dasent's version of *Njáls saga*, prepared 'simply as a brave story for men who have been boys and for boys who are going to be men' (Dasent 1900: vii; Wawn 2000: 161), to R. M. Ballantyne's *Erling the Bold* (1869), which 'emphasises the evils of drink (42) and disobedience (287)' (Wawn 2000: 323). Wawn also reveals that what we might think of as novels suitable for adults, such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Harold* (1848) and Charles Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake* (1866), were presented as school and Sunday school prizes and birthday gifts (2000: 315). At this point in the development of children's literature, long complex narratives could clearly maintain young readers' attention, and moralization and exhortation were tolerable.

Retellings of Norse myths were popular, such as those by the Keary sisters (1857) in whose volume children are provided on each day of the week with the relevant god whose name it shares, and such retellings have in common a concern to eliminate material considered risqué or inappropriate for children, along with an educational aim. The Keary collection has had an exceptionally long publication history and exerted an influence on Rudyard Kipling, particularly in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1993 [1906]: 200), who in turn, it is argued below, influenced later medievalist works.[3]

By the end of the nineteenth century, schoolchildren provided a large and willingly captive audience for William Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) and the saga reworkings of Sabine Baring-Gould, particularly his *Grettir the Outlaw* (1890), with their various moral lessons (Wawn 2000: 272, 296). Wawn shows how these novels and others deemed appropriate for both adults and adolescents were 'politicised texts' (2000: 313), inculcating the values of the Empire

[3] For a discussion of nineteenth-century British illustrations to children's books, including the Keary collection, see Chapter 6.2.5 in Volume 1 of this study.

and the British upper class in their readers. He also presents a detailed analysis of Rider Haggard's novel *Eric Bright-Eyes*, unpicking its syncretic assimilation of a plethora of saga motifs, particularly from *Gísla saga*, *Grettis saga* and *Njáls saga* (Wawn 2000: 333).[4]

The Twentieth Century

The first half of the twentieth century saw continued reprints and new editions of popular nineteenth-century works, and further publications of retellings of Norse myths and of historical novels set in the Viking period. Particularly notable retellings include Allen French's *Heroes of Iceland* (1902), an adaptation of Dasent's translation of *Njáls saga* (1861), and H. A. Guerber's *Myths of the Norsemen* (1908), singled out by C. S. Lewis, as we shall see, as one of the formative influences of his childhood. (Lewis and Tolkien are considered separately below.) In terms of historical fiction, however, Henry Treece dominates the lists with his popular *Viking Saga* trilogy (1955, 1957, 1960), which follows the life of Harald Sigurdson from boyhood to death on voyages and adventures from Norway to Scotland and the Hebrides, to Miklagard (Constantinople), Iceland, Greenland and North America. Treece provides historical introductions to his novels and in the last explains that he is most attracted to the 'Northmen' by their 'story-telling' with its characteristic 'dry and even [...] grim sense of humour, for the men of the North were not given to self-pity' (Treece 1960: 10). He emulates this style, along with the sagas' enthusiasm for 'fantastic people and their incredible adventures' (Treece 1960: 10). Treece followed up the success of this trilogy with *Man with a Sword* (1962), a story of Hereward the Wake; *Horned Helmet* (1963), a tale of the Jomsvikings; and *The Last of the Vikings* (1964), an account of Harald Hardrada. His novels combine vivid scene setting, memorable characters, historical plausibility and fast-paced action. The *doyenne* of children's historical fiction of this period is Rosemary Sutcliff. Although her main interest was in Celtic legend and the Roman Britons, she also contributed *Blood Feud* (1976), the story of a freed Viking slave's journey to Constantinople, and, posthumously, *Sword Song* (1997), the tale of a Viking outlaw-turned-mercenary. Although there is no space to consider the field fully here, the bibliography lists other historical novels and retellings. However, as well as Sutcliff and Treece, the other major influence on medievalism in modern children's fiction is that of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis.

[4] Wawn (2000: 313–14) lists several more Victorian and Edwardian children's novels, mostly unresearched.

Oxford and the Inklings

There is a growing number of studies of the medievalism of Tolkien and Lewis (Shippey 1992; Ward 2008). A chapter by Carolyne Larrington (2013: 63–67) summarizes the main Norse influences on Tolkien: the eddic-derived names of the dwarves, the folkloric trolls, Bilbo's riddle contest with Gollum (his morally dubious triumph by asking an unanswerable question clearly reminiscent of Óðinn's practice in *Vafþrúðnismál* and elsewhere), Smaug's character (similar to Fáfnir) and name (cf. Old Norse *smjúga*) (see Chapter 6.2 above). Tom Shippey also points out the dwarves' association with stone (from *Völuspá*), and legalism (from sagas such as *Hrafnkels saga*), the sword Dáinsleif (from *Heiðreks saga*), the orcs and the Misty Mountains (from *Skírnismál*) (Shippey 1992: 57–58, 77, 297), the *wargs* (Old Norse *vargr*), Gandalf's name (Old Norse Gandálfr) and the Barrow-wights (Shippey 2000: 16–17, 30, 61).[5]

Lewis's specific debts to Old Norse are harder to pin down, though the White Witch's eternal winter and her captain Fenris Ulf (in American editions; Maugrim in British ones) obviously recall the *fimbulvetr* ('mighty winter') of Ragnarök and Fenrir (cf. Larrington 2013: 62). However, his formative childhood encounter with Wagner and with Longfellow's poetic invocation of the death of Baldur in his *The Saga of King Olaf* (1864) is much recounted and marked the beginnings of a lifelong obsession with all forms of Germanic mythology and his search for 'Joy' (Lewis 1955: 17).[6]

His passionate friendship with Arthur Greeves was sealed when they realized they both liked *Myths of the Norsemen* (Lewis 1955: 130; Guerber 1908). Lewis was well read in Norse literature, wrote a 'Norse' tragedy called 'Loki Bound' in 1914 (1914: 114–15) and discussed Norse mythology in adult works such as *God in the Dock* (Lewis 1970). His influence, and that of Tolkien, is far-reaching in the field of children's literature, and particularly on those authors educated or brought up in Oxford.

[5] There are also Norse influences on Tolkien's other works such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, but these are, of course, not aimed at a child audience. See Shippey (2005), Burns (2005), DuBois and Mellor (2002), Evans (2000) and Heinemann (1992).

[6] In pre-1994 American versions of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), the firestones of the Secret Hill on which the Deep Magic is carved are replaced by the 'trunk of the world ash tree' (Beard 2013).

The Oxford School and Beyond

Recently a fair amount of critical attention has been devoted to the novels of what is becoming known as the Oxford School: that is writers such as Susan Cooper, Alan Garner, Kevin Crossley-Holland, Diana Wynne Jones and Philip Pullman, who were educated in Oxford and whose work bears its traces. In an important piece of unpublished doctoral research, Maria Sachiko Cecire analyzes the influence of Lewis, Tolkien and the Oxford English syllabus on these later authors, whose works represent a productive interaction between traditional views of medieval literature and the generic conventions of high fantasy (Cecire 2011).

Since Crossley-Holland, Jones and Pullman are discussed below, here we shall briefly consider Susan Cooper and Alan Garner. Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising* sequence (Cooper 1965–77) and Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963) represent an eclectic mix of Anglo-Saxon, later medieval, Norse and Celtic elements. I have discussed the influence of the Alfred Jewel and Anglo-Saxonism in *The Dark Is Rising* (1973) elsewhere (Clark 2013: 100–01). A similar artefact features as the fifth of the Six Signs, the Sign of Fire, with a parallel inscription. The great kings and Lords of the Light, Alfred and Arthur, represent for Cooper national heroes who held off invasions of the island of Britain by the forces of darkness, violence and ignorance — represented by the Vikings (Drout 1997). The Vikings appear throughout the sequence as marauding invaders, the Anglo-Saxons as beleaguered craftsmen.

Both Cooper and Garner are more influenced by Celtic than Norse myths and legends. Like Cooper, though, Garner also draws on Norse myth, and especially effectively in his evocation of Ragnarök in the final chapter of *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*:

> Racing out of the north was a cloud, lower than any that hid the sun, and black. Monstrous it was, and in shape a ravening wolf. Its loins fell below the horizon, and its lean body arched across the sky to pouncing shoulders, and a head with jaws agape that even now was over the far end of the valley. Eyes glowed yellow with lightning, and the first snarls of thunder were heard above the cries of the morthbrood. There seemed to be one thought in all their minds — escape. But when Fenrir of Ragnarok is about his master's bidding, such thoughts are less than dreams. (Garner 1960: 219–20)

Garner conscientiously acknowledges his debts in a note at the end of *The Moon of Gomrath*, explaining that the names of people and places are real 'even where

the characters are invented' because, as other authors have found, 'a made-up name feels wrong' (Garner 1963: 154). As well as the many Celtic debts, he singles out the '*Einheriar* [...] the bodyguard of the gods in Scandinavian mythology' and '*The Herlathing* [...] the English form of the Wild Hunt' (1963: 154). Other borrowings include the *ljósálfar*, the svarts, the characterization of Durathror and the names Brisingamen, Grimnir, Nastrond, Rimthur and Managarm (Larrington 2013: 72–74, and see her podcast, Larrington 2013e). In his note, Garner expresses his conviction that 'there are no original stories [...]. Originality now means the personal colouring of existing themes' (1963: 155), and many of the other writers discussed below would concur.

Crossing into the Second Millennium

Very little attention has been given to the large amount of fiction of the past twenty-five years which betrays Norse influences of various kinds, from superficial aspects such as people and place-names to more far-reaching influence on plot and thematic interests. Medievalist scrutiny has principally fallen on the Young Adult novels of Melvin Burgess: *Bloodtide* (1999) and *Bloodsong* (2007) (Larrington 2011). As the bibliography to this chapter indicates, however, there are many other works which await detailed analysis. Since the mid-twentieth century sees a shift which introduces a new kind of children's book that blends medievalism and fantasy, the following sections offer some suggestions as to useful ways to categorize and organize the material and present an overview of the scope and range of Norse-inspired material. This chapter ends, however, by giving a more detailed sense of the themes and motifs that are characteristic of these novels by presenting an in-depth analysis of Francesca Simon's *The Sleeping Army* (2011) as a case study.

Categorization

It must be stated at the outset that the question of how to define and delimit children's literature has received a lot of attention within the field but not generated any very conclusive results (for discussion, see Hollindale 1997; cf. Reynolds 2011: 3). Therefore for the purposes of this chapter I have adopted a rather loose but pragmatic definition: that is, literature which is marketed towards, or read by, a predominantly child audience. As Karen Lesnik-Oberstein has pointed out, however, 'the child does not exist. For the purposes of children's literature criticism [...], the "child" is a construction, constructed and described

in different, often clashing terms' (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994: 9). This problem can also be evaded by adopting an equally pragmatic set of age-related subdivisions, which enable one to talk about 'children' instead of 'the child', and which tacitly acknowledges the influences of publishers and marketing teams on the production and consumption of children's literature. However, the discussion of age-related categories is followed by an attempt to arrive at some generic distinctions.[7]

Age-Related Categories

1. *Young Children*. This first category comprises books aimed at young children of primary school age, which tend to be shorter works that contain a large number of illustrations and employ a restricted vocabulary. For instance, Shoo Rayner's *Vik the Viking* series contains books that are under fifty pages long and develop a single narrative strand or simple moral or practical lesson. In *Viking Vik and the Viking Longship* (Rayner 2008) the small Scandinavian boy Vik (along with the reader) is taught about fjords, longships and the story of Thor and Jormungand, and he learns the importance of Viking bravery. In Mary Pope Osborne's *Viking Ships at Sunrise* (1998), time-travelling siblings Jack and Annie have direct encounters with Irish monks and Viking raiders and learn both historical facts about those two groups and moral lessons about the importance of preserving civilization in the form of books and the knowledge they contain (cf. Jarman 2008). Children also learn the value of education and cultural heritage in Sandi Toksvig's book *The Littlest Viking* (Toksvig 2008). Here a small Viking girl called Amber loses her way in time and space and winds up in Pegwell Bay in Kent, where she teaches three siblings bits of Norse mythology and has strong words to say about the importance of both courage and literacy. Finally, Terry Deary's series of four historical novelettes open up Viking history and culture in four different locations at historically significant junctures: from Norway, (793) and Whitby (867) to Wessex (878) and North America (1009) (Deary 2010). His stories fuse historical detail with Norse myth, and child readers can learn alternately about the experience of Viking slaves and Odin's acquisition of wisdom; about Viking raids and Thor's battle with Old Age; about King Alfred's infiltration of the Viking camp and Freyr's loss of his self-wielding sword; about the Skraelings and the gods' trickery of Fenrir. The myths have a specific relevance or lesson for each of Deary's child protagonists.

[7] For discussion of other ways to categorize and characterize children's literature, see Marshall (1988), ch. 2.

2. *Older Children*. The second subdivision involves books aimed at older children (or children with an older reading age), which tend to be longer and develop more complex themes and narrative techniques. They are generally less frequently illustrated, except for humorous works, where illustrations are often an important aspect of a book's character, as with Steve Cole's *Cows in Action 12: The Viking Emoo-gency* (2012).

Like Mary Pope Osborne's *Magic Treehouse* series and Terry Deary's *Tales* series, *Cows in Action* exploits a range of historical periods and geographical locations. In *The Viking Emoo-gency* the bovine protagonists must intervene to ensure that King Alfred defeats the Vikings at the Battle of Edington, fighting against a rival time-travelling group of bulls who plan to change history in order to enslave humanity. Although clearly Cole's main focus is absurdist humour, he manages along the way to weave in historical facts about the Vikings, and to debunk the myth that they wore horned helmets. The implicit moral lesson of the book is that courage is important, but that physical violence should be avoided where compromise is possible, as in Alfred's truce. Cole also manages to get comic mileage out of postmodern philosophical questions about the nature of history and the effects of the historian's own perspective and prejudices in making history come alive.

Jon Scieszka's *The Time Warp Trio: Viking It and Liking It* (2002) is another comic time-travel novel, and is again part of a wide-ranging series. Like Cole, Scieszka is careful to dismiss the horned helmet myth, and he too includes lots of historical and cultural detail about the Vikings. Set in North America, Cole's story makes much of the fact that the Norsemen did travel to and attempt to colonize America. He also gets comic mileage out of his irreverent versions of skaldic verse, he alludes to a number of Norse myths and emphasizes the Norse values of fame and reputation after death. The book's paratext includes information on the days of the week, Norse patronymics, runes and some (rather misleading) comments on saga-composition.

Both Scieszka and Cole's books could be classified as having an educational impulse, as could Terry Deary's. (For explicitly educational material, cf. Wallace 1998, Harvey 2009.) By contrast, Cressida Cowell's semi-comic series *How to Train Your Dragon* (2003–14) is at least superficially keen to advertise its distance from anything educational.[8] At the start of the tenth installment, *How to Seize a Dragon's Jewel* (and indeed the other volumes), Cowell prints a large sign:

[8] This is undermined somewhat by the extensive marketing materials at the back of the books, one example of which suggests that children 'convince [their] teacher to sign up for a *Dragonese Day pack*!' (Cowell 2013).

> WARNING. Any relationship to any historical fact WHATSOEVER is entirely coincidental. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.

The novel and series make up a classic quest narrative in which the hero, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, and his dragon friends must collect the ten Lost Things needed to end the Great War between humans and dragons despite heavy opposition from the villainous Alvin the Treacherous and his mother, the Witch Excellinor, as they attempt to rule the Viking race (Cowell 2012: 13–14). The Norse content of the novel is minimal and consists mainly of names and some brief allusions to gods and mythic heroes. The Vikings' helmets have anachronistic horns (Cowell 2008: 250), and the intelligent book-loving Hiccup is an atypical hero, since we meet the Vikings at the pirate-raider stage of their cultural development, as Cowell tells us in the sixth book in the series: 'Vikings are the Terrors of the Seas, the Scourge of Civilisation, great Barbarian Warriors of the North' (Cowell 2007: 14).

Cowell does, however, negotiate and discuss issues of the nature of heroism, the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions, of being loyal to friends and merciful to enemies and the question of whether past history merely affects or in fact predetermines the present. Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (Pullman 1995, 1997, 2000) and Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance* novels (Paolini 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011) are some of the other prominent novels to draw on Norse material in very specific and limited (usually linguistic) ways. For instance, Pullman says he took the name for the armoured bear Iorek Byrnison from an Old Norse glossary; he created Æsahættr and other names from Norse roots, and looser Norse influences can be traced (Weich 2003). The speech of the elves of Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance* series contains Norse elements (Tilton 2005).

Rosalind Kerven's *Grim Gruesome Viking Villain* books are a series of fantasy-inflected historical novels. Viking characters in a range of settings from Norway and Iceland to Jorvik and medieval Orkney swear by and pray to the Norse gods, and recite Norse stories and poems. The plot of the first novel, *The Cursed Sword* (2008), borrows from the myth of Freyr's self-wielding sword again, berserkers are important to the second one, *The Queen's Poison* (2009), and in all four novels (so far) the indestructible Grim Gruesome has a penchant for quoting Odin's sayings in *Hávamál*. Kerven's child protagonists experience a bewildering blur of fast-paced and life-endangering incidents, but by solving riddles or clues and by choosing to follow their better instincts, they eventually triumph over the gruesomely depicted child-hating villain. The characters believe in the Norse gods, but the latter do not appear in the books, in which

human ingenuity and moral rectitude are what is needed to prevail. Similarly, Neil Gaiman's charming *Odd and the Frost Giants* (2008) describes how its crippled but resourceful protagonist unites with Loki, Thor and Odin in animal form to rid Asgard of the bullying frost giants who have invaded it.

Finally in this category, Katherine Langrish's *Troll Fell* series is another set of fantasy-inflected historical novels, although Langrish is more interested here in Scandinavian folklore than mythology, and populates Troll Fell with trolls, water-demons, merrows, *draugar* and house spirits. The first two novels are locally based, but in the third the child protagonists sail to Vinland where Norse and Native American folklore collide.

3. *Young Adult fiction*. This third category includes books which, as the name suggests, are marketed for an audience of older or more mature adolescents, and which may contain sexual or drug-related content and what is described in the film industry as 'strong language'. This category is a relatively recent subgenre and includes Melvin Burgess's *Bloodtide* (1999) and *Bloodsong* (2007), Marcus Sedgwick's *Midwinterblood* (2011) and Joanne Harris's *Runemarks* (2007) and *Runelight* (2011). I will return to Harris shortly, but Burgess's novels constitute a startling post-apocalyptic reimagining of the Sigurd legend, and Carolyne Larrington has written recently on the way they rework *Völsunga saga*'s themes of incestuous desire and ambivalent heroism, engaging with the implications of genetic modification, cloning and hybridity (Larrington 2011).

Marcus Sedgwick's *Midwinterblood* is an unusually structured book. Like his other novels, it is written in spare, vigorous prose with heavy elements of horror and the macabre and it has a strong vein of medieval myth and legend running through it. Each of Sedgwick's seven chapters features a separate storyline set in different time periods, like David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, but here we start with June 2073 and proceed backwards to the tenth century. The book ends with a vividly detailed account of a prehistoric ritual sacrifice of the *hieros gamos* type, but Sedgwick weaves together elements of the various narratives in a complex interlace, employing the narrative conceit that the original sacrificial victim and his queen are reincarnated in each subsequent age in different guises and with different relationships. They appear as siblings threatened by a vampire revenant, as forbidden lesbian lovers in a ghost story, as blocked artist and curious child, as hostile islander and a young woman who never meets her father's saviour, as mother and son, and as journalist and strangely familiar island lover. Several pieces of Norse myth and history feature in the novel, with allusions to *Völuspá* and the sagas, but its ultimate inspiration lies in Carl Larsson's painting *Midvinterblot* (1915, 'Mid-Winter Sacrifice') which hangs

in the National Museum of Stockholm (Sedgwick 2011: 264; on this painting, see Chapter 6.2.2 in Volume 1 of this study).

Evidently, there is a lot of potential overlap between these three age-related categories, and, in practice, individual children rarely restrict themselves to the category deemed suitable for their age group. Adolescents and adults, of course, continue to read books aimed at younger audiences alongside 'age-appropriate' fiction. Moreover, medievalist authors themselves commonly write fiction for both adult and child markets, which tends toward a cross-fertilization of audiences. Particularly notable in this regard is Neil Gaiman who draws on Norse myth in both the short children's novel, *Odd and the Frost Giants*, and in the adult novel *American Gods*, both of which are read by adult and child alike (Gaiman 2008; 2011 [2001]). Therefore, along with any division by age, a generic division proves useful.

Generic Categories

Genre is not, of course, an unproblematic area. As Kimberley Reynolds points out, children's literature is often seen as a genre in itself, but it also contains within it 'all the genres and subgenres used to classify writing' (Reynolds 2011: 77). Moreover, as the discussion above of Kerven and Sedgwick indicates, genre boundaries are difficult to maintain strictly. Nevertheless, three broad categories are convenient in analytical terms.

1. *Retellings*. This first subgenre is the most straightforward and comprises retellings of Old Norse texts and legends aimed at children, such as the one by the Keary sisters discussed earlier.[9] Many of the older collections from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have a long reading life, and some are still regularly reprinted. Kevin Crossley-Holland's 1980 collection, *Norse Myths*, later republished and still in print as *The Penguin Book of Norse Myths* (Crossley-Holland 1980 and 1982) has proven particularly popular and is credited as an influence on later novels such as Francesca Simon's *The Sleeping Army* (Simon 2011: 224) and on Neil Gaiman's use of Norse myth in the *Sandman* novels (Crossley-Holland 2010). Although this collection was not aimed at children, a shorter selection with illustrations was published as *Axe-Age, Wolf-Age* (Crossley-Holland 1985). Both in fact have enjoyed child audiences, owing to Crossley-Holland's story-telling verve and deep knowledge of both the prose and poetic Eddas. The introduction to the latest version of *The Penguin Book of*

[9] On retellings of myths and legends, see Stephens (2009).

Norse Myths provides an exemplary and accessible introduction to Norse myth and culture (Crossley-Holland 1993). At the time of editing, Gaiman himself has just published an acclaimed modern retelling for adults, which will inevitably also attract younger readers. In his introduction (Gaiman 2017), he generously acknowledges the influence of Lancelyn Green (1960) and Crossley-Holland, as well as the Eddas.

Also into this category (along with others in the bibliography) fit Neil Philip's *Odin's Family: Myths of the Vikings* (1996), and Mary Pope Osborne's *Favorite Norse Myths* (1996), both based primarily on the *Prose Edda*; Isabel Wyatt's saga-derived *Norse Hero Tales* (1997) and *Legends of the Norse Kings* (2010); Michael Cox's humorous take on the *Top Ten Viking Legends* (1999); and, for younger readers, Jeff Menges's colouring book, *Norse Gods and Goddesses* (2004); and Tony Bradman's *Gods of Thunder* in the *Oxford Reading Tree* series (2010).

2. *Historical Fiction*. The second subgenre is traditional historical fiction, and the best-known proponents of the children's historical novel are Henry Treece and Rosemary Sutcliff, discussed earlier.[10] Both these authors' medievalist novels have also exerted a strong influence on later writers. One of the best examples of contemporary writers of historical fiction, however, is again Kevin Crossley-Holland.

Crossley-Holland is perhaps best known to children for his award-winning Arthur trilogy and to medievalists for his retellings of the Norse myths discussed above. In *Bracelet of Bones* (2011), however, he fuses his expertise in the historical novel with his familiarity with Norse literature. This beautifully written and poetic novel is crammed full of fragments of Norse myth and legend, along with well-chosen details from medieval Russian and Anglo-Saxon literary culture and Crossley-Holland's own invented verse. Several characters believe in the Norse gods, or debate their relative merits alongside the Christian or Baltic divinities, and Norse myth colours the way that his fifteen-year-old protagonist Solveig experiences the world. As well as a version of a human sacrifice as recounted by Ibn Fadlan, Crossley-Holland has various characters quote gnomic wisdom from *Hávamál*, compose poems with a skaldic quality and tell stories deriving from *Gylfaginning*, *Völundarkviða*, *Grottasöngr* and *Hárbarðsljóð*. *Bracelet of Bones* is the first in a trilogy which promises to introduce a vivid and well-researched version of medieval Scandinavia to a generation of children.

[10] On historical fiction for children, see Lawson (2003).

As well as Rayner (2008) and Deary (2010), already discussed, this category would also include Rosalind Kerven's *Sorcery and Gold* (1998) and *The Man Who Found America* (1999), Marcus Sedgwick's *The Dark Horse* (2002), Pauline Chandler's *Viking Girl* (2007), Susan Price's *Feasting the Wolf* (2007), Sue Purkiss's *Warrior King* (2008) and Stephen Rabley's *A New World* (2010). However, as with the Kerven novels discussed above, there are historical novels which do not adhere to strict principles of realism, and therefore they are explored in the following section, although the division is clearly difficult to maintain rigorously.

3. *Fantasy (Timeslip and Transformational)*. The third category is fantasy, which can be further divided into timeslip and transformational fantasy, although again these categories overlap to some extent.[11]

Timeslip Fantasy

In timeslip fantasies Norse characters (whether historical figures or mythological gods or heroes) invade the present of the novel, as for instance in Diana Wynne Jones's *Eight Days of Luke* (1975), where the Norse gods appear in twentieth-century suburbia (Clark 2007; cf. Toksvig 2008). Alternatively, figures from the novel's present may be transported into the medieval past, as in Cole (2012) or Mary Pope Osborne's *Viking Ships at Sunrise* (1998), in which, as we have seen, two children time-travel to an Irish monastery under threat from Viking raiders. The timeslip fantasy seems to have been first used for children in Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* (both published in 1906), but to have been popularized for Norse material by the Diana Wynne Jones novel (cf. Hall 2001). There are several straightforward examples of timeslip fantasies. In David Sacks and Brian Ross's *Vigfus the Viking* (2008), a Viking boy is plunged forward into modern New York and must learn how to behave and to negotiate different cultural values. However, by the end he learns that he need not abandon his own heritage, just tone down the violence: 'we can still be Vikings [...]. We can still torch things, and we can still eat with our hands' (via a barbeque in Central Park) and 'We can still bonk!' (in baseball) (Sacks and Ross 2008: not paginated). In J. Dickman's *Bjarki the Viking* (2010) there is timeslip back and forward and incorporating a geographical slip from the Wirral (Liverpool, England) to Birka (Sweden).

[11] On children's fantasy generally, see initially Attebury (1992), Coats (2010), Manlove (2003), Mendlesohn (2008) and Nikolajeva (2006).

Finally, in Julia Jarman's *The Time-Travelling Cat and the Viking Terror* (2008), Topher and his cat are transported to an Anglo-Saxon village in Norfolk to save it from Viking marauders (who include Ingwar the Boneless).

Transformational Fantasy

In transformational fantasies, authors take one of two approaches: they may create a generally accurately researched version of the medieval past in which fantasy elements are incorporated into the everyday reality of the world (and might therefore be classed as magic(al) realist works; Clark 2013: 11); alternatively they may draw upon Norse material in order to create a Secondary World characterized by fantasy elements, whether that is conceived as a past, present or future world in relation to the Primary (or 'real') World of the novel. Of course, the transformational fantasy's most enduring influences come from Tolkien, but it has become a particularly popular genre in the last twenty years, perhaps the dominant genre.

Catherine Fisher's *Snow-Walker Trilogy* (1993, 1995, 1996) draws on Old English poetry but takes most of its inspiration from Norse mythology. The chapter headings in *The Snow Walker's Son* (1993) are taken from W. H. Auden's and Paul B. Taylor's version of the Old Norse mythological poem *Hávamál*, and those in *The Soul Thieves* (1995) are taken from their version of *Völuspá*. A. J. Lake's *Darkest Age* series combines historical detail from Anglo-Saxon England and Viking culture with dragons and magic. The series starts with *The Coming of Dragons* (2006), followed by *The Book of the Sword* (2008) and *The Circle of Stone* (2008). Nancy Farmer's *The Sea of Trolls* (2004) incorporates Saxons, Northmen (Vikings), magical animals, trolls, the Norns and Grendel. Finally, Joanne Harris's *Runemarks* (2007) and *Runelight* (2011) postulate Ragnarök as a recurrent event and create an entire world based on Norse mythology and the interactions of the gods.[12]

From an overall perspective it seems that the most popular themes in the literature are Viking raiders and berserkers, and the myths of Odin and his one eye, Freyr and his sword which fights by itself, and the Midgard serpent, with or without Thor. However, Norse culture can feature in a variety of guises, from *Leo Baggins and the Viking Dragon* (Anon. 1976) and Steve Barlow and Steve Skidmore's *Viking Blood* (2007), where Vikings feature unproblematically as raiders and purveyors of vengeance, to Lyn Halvorsen's *Anton the Brave Viking*

[12] I will discuss Harris in more detail in a forthcoming book chapter: 'It's not the End of the World: The Neo-Norse cosmology of Joanne Harris'.

(2011), where the protagonist discovers 'you have kindness in your heart, and THAT is the most important part of being a Viking' (Halvorsen 2011: 32).

Rather than look briefly at different versions of these themes and usages, though, I want to look at a single novel in some detail to see what work Norse literature and culture is performing for its author, and that novel is Francesca Simon's *The Sleeping Army*. Along with Joanne Harris's *Runemarks* (2007) and *Runelight* (2011), which it parallels in some ways, it deserved scrutiny as a recent and prominent reworking of Norse myth. It exemplifies some of the key developments in children's literature over the twentieth century, which are most prominently displayed in transformational fantasy, that is, the attempt to provide a challenge to the status quo and particularly to dominant religious ideologies, a conscious reworking of genre from within, playing with and manipulating conventions and foregrounding an awareness of intertexuality and the provisionality or contingency of any one way of looking at the world. What is also characteristic in this novel, however, as in many but not all children's fantasies, is the way that its subversive potential is contained and limited at the end, so that the suturing of medieval and modern turns out to be temporary and a way of re-envisioning the present in potential terms only whilst simultaneously reinstating that present.

Francesca Simon's Sleeping Army

Francesca Simon is best known as the author of the *Horrid Henry* series, and *The Sleeping Army* (published by Faber and Faber in 2011) was a new departure into the area of Old Norse-inspired fantasy aimed at slightly older children (her protagonist Freya is fourteen).[13] The book's premise is inscribed on an otherwise blank and unnumbered page in the forematter: 'What if Christianity didn't exist? What if people still worshipped the old Norse and Anglo-Saxon gods [...]?' This rhetorical question sits between the Contents page and a double-spread illustration of a Scandinavian-inspired landscape with high jagged mountain peaks and the impression of icy winds in the background and rivers and a volcanic landscape in the foreground. Periodically throughout the novel after this, hand-drawn illustrations of Norse artefacts such as rune-engraved jewelled drinking-horns, bloody swords and embossed shields vie for intratextual space with trolls, wolves, ravens, eagles and items from the Isle of Lewis

[13] Simon has published two sequels to date: *The Lost Gods* (2013) and *The Monstrous Child* (2016).

Chessmen. It is four pieces from this famous chess-set which come alive when the young protagonist Freya blows Heimdall's horn in the British Museum and sparks off the book's main plot.

Two of the pieces turn out to be Thor's servants from Snorri's *Gylfaginning*, Thialfi (known here by the Michael Caine-esque diminutive 'Alfi') and Roskva. They have been sentenced to wait as ivory pieces as part of Woden's 'sleeping army' until they are needed to restore the gods' fortunes, aged, sick and weak as they have become without Idunn's apples of eternal youth since she was stolen by Loki and given to the giant Thjazi. With the other two chess-pieces, a berserker named Snot and Woden's eight-legged horse Sleipnir, Freya must find Idunn and return her to Asgard before Woden's sentence overtakes her and her companions and they turn into ivory chess pieces. The inspiration for the use of the Lewis Chessmen is revealed at the end of the novel when Woden insists that the sleeping army must remain at rest until 'the forces of darkness rise up at the fated end of days and another world begins'. He quotes a version of the mysterious lines at the end of *Völuspá*: 'There afterwards will be found in the shining grass | Wondrous chess pieces | Treasures which the Gods possessed in ancient times' (Simon 2011: 211).[14]

Thereafter, Simon strikes a balance between the straightforward adoption of Norse mythological elements, such as 'the wind-swept world tree Yggdrasil' (2011: 38; cf. 2011: 159), and a transformational approach that relies on two principal techniques: familiarization and comic undercutting. We shall return to these techniques in detail shortly, but first we must consider one of the more curious aspects of the novel which is emphasized by the magical intervention into Freya's world, and which provides an answer to the original paratextual question of what would happen if Germanic paganism replaced Christianity as the dominant British religion. As in many fantasies, Simon delineates a Secondary World richly peopled with characters and elements from Norse mythology. However, her protagonist is thrown into this Secondary World from a Primary World which is largely identical with ours, except that it is not dominated by Christianity, which we learn in the first chapter died out 'at the end of the 34th century AW' (2011: 10), or 'After Woden'. Instead, the major world religion is Wodenism, a change which apparently has only superficial consequences for world history.

[14] This appears to be Simon's own translation, modelled on that in Larrington (1996: 12): 'There afterwards will be found in the grass | the wonderful golden chequers, | those which they possessed in the ancient times' (Larrington 2014: 11) substitutes 'There will be found again in the grass | the wonderful golden chequers, | those which they possessed in the bygone days'.

Queen Elizabeth is the titular 'head of the Fane of England', but most people pay only lip-service to Wodenism: Simon says 'Baby-namings were still popular, and swearing on Thor's sacred oath-ring of course, but apart from that the Fanes weren't exactly bursting at the seams' (2011: 7). Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* is delivered by the 'Archpriest of York', and Freya's mother Clare rails 'from her altar against atheists like Richard Dawkins for his book, *The Gods Delusion*' (2011: 7). There is an amusing twist on the Fifth Commandment, which becomes 'Honour your children, for they alone will remember your name' (2011: 8), nodding to the Germanic obsession with posthumous reputation. However, Freya's history homework will be very familiar to the book's implied audience of schoolchildren: 'Henry VIII broke with the Lord High Priest of Copenhagen and established the Fane of England in 4534. What were the reasons?' (2011: 9). Similarly, Freya sees an exhibition poster advertising the sketches for 'Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of Woden feasting with his warriors at the last supper in Valhalla before Ragnarok' (2011: 4). The pleasure here is not that of creating a plausible alternative history, as, for instance, in Joan Aiken's *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* (1962), but of dressing cultural and historical landmarks in Germanic disguises and inviting the reader to locate the corresponding element from their own world. It does of course also suggest an original approach to answering the much-debated philosophical question of whether the death of any one person or alteration of any one event would have a substantial effect on the course of history: that is, probably not, since the changes are generally superficial in extent.

It is notable that the Anglo-Saxon form Woden is used in preference to Odin throughout, but the Norse form is given in a list of his epithets by Alfi that owes something to *Skáldskaparmál*'s lists of *heiti* and kennings ('Woden. Odin. All-Father. The Much-Wise. The God of Victory. The One-eyed'; 2011: 27). Woden aside, Norse myth *is* the primary source for Simon: in her epilogue she expresses gratitude for the scholarly help of Eric Stanley, Mary Clayton and Emily Lethbridge, and points the reader to Kevin Crossley-Holland's *The Penguin Book of Norse Myths* (Simon 2011; Crossley-Holland 1993). Freya is initially uninterested in the Wodenic religion or its beliefs: she yawns at the da Vinci painting of Woden, dismisses her mother's religious faith (2011: 8) and has to have Ragnarök explained to her by her father as 'the day when the world ends and the Gods die in a great battle' (2011: 5) named by 'the prophet Snorri Sturluson' as 'the *Twilight of the Gods*'. It is only in the secondary world into which she is dragged that Freya comes into living contact with the gods and learns more about the pantheon through physical interaction. Significantly, at the end of the novel when Freya returns, having saved Asgard, her supposedly religious mother

Clare treats Freya's description of her adventure as the result of concussion. It is only her father, who at the start of the novel is said not to be a believer, who seems open to Freya's newfound knowledge of the gods (2011: 220–21). On one level, this is a familiar comment on the way that those who seem the most assiduously religious may not in fact see the genuine heart of their faith. On a more abstract level, however, it is a version of the 'all just a dream' trope: it restores the protagonist and the reader to the 'real' world and closes off the subversive potential of the fantasy world in a way similar to Bakhtin's account of the function of Carnival (Bakhtin 1984; Stallybrass and White 1986). Simon represents Freya as being only too glad to 'go back to her normal, boring life, shuttling between her parents, losing her gym kit, and being told off for leaving her junk all over the kitchen' (2011: 215). *This* is what she sees as 'wonderful', rather than the strength and resourcefulness she has discovered in her mission to save Asgard. Freya's final rejection of the secondary world is also difficult to square with one of the moral lessons she (and therefore her reader) learns earlier in the novel. At this point, Snot the berserker demands of a rebellious and upset Freya 'Is this how you want your saga to end? [...] Crying and mewling? After the sword, or sickness, or old age ends your life, only reputation lives on' (2011: 72). Freya rejects this Germanic sentiment, retorting 'I don't care about my saga! [...] I want to go home.' Children who identify with her attitude, however, are shown by her example that this will not do, as Freya realizes that she cannot escape her fate and that no one knows what one's fate will be. She decides that 'if I only have nine more days to live then I'd better make the best of them'. But this point of view is difficult to square with the less adventurous one Freya is represented as having at the conclusion of her adventures.

We must return now to the novel's dominant techniques of familiarization and undercutting (cf. Clark 2007). Simon uses its initial set-up to establish empathy with Freya on the part of the implied audience. Freya's home life is that of a typical teenager, juggled between her 'efficient [...] competent' mother and her British Museum security guard father, who has Freya 'on Thorsdays not Wodnesdays now, and every other weekend' (2011: 2). Her parents fight whenever they interact, and Freya is 'an only child, and used to trying to make things better' (2011: 3). So far, so normal, and Simon uses this sense of Freya as a normal teenager with normal interests and problems throughout her descriptions of the Secondary World to familiarize the unfamiliar Norse elements for her readers. For instance, once the Lewis Chessmen have come alive and dragged Freya onto Bifrost, it is described as 'the flaming, three-coloured rainbow' (2011: 21), and Freya is able to identify it because she has learned about it 'in Sunday school' (2011: 22). The description of the otherworldly scenario

is interlaced with real-world referents to leaven the shock of the new. Similarly, the disgustingly dirty but treasure-strewn hall of the giants, Thrymheim, is said to remind Freya 'of a picture she'd once seen in *Hello!* magazine of a Russian oligarch and his spiky-taloned wife enthroned in a gilded gold room' (2011: 124–25). Although there is a disquietingly McCarthyite suggestion that Russians, like the giants, are the repudiated 'other' in this scenario, it does create a vivid real-world referent image for the reader.

Undercutting, likewise, is most often used to make elements of Norse myth seem less alien, as when Roskva says of Thjalfi: 'They say only thought can outrun him [...]. Bit of an exaggeration, but he's pretty speedy' (2011: 41). The allusion to Thjalfi's role in the Útgarða-Loki episode in *Gylfaginning* is brought down to earth by Roskva's characterization of it as an exaggeration. Similarly, Freya discovers that Woden has 'secret runes, the ones I sacrificed my eye for' (2011: 65), but the high seriousness of *Hávamál* is undercut, when he is depicted as being too senile to remember them all, or even (it later transpires) which one is which.

Most often familiarization and undercutting are used together. When one of Woden's rune-spells manages to conjure up a spectre instead of the desired effect, Freya wonders 'Was this the spirit version of a wrong number?' (2011: 157). Similarly, the last Freya sees of her divine namesake, as she totters off to get more apples from Idunn, is because 'I still have bingo wings!' (2011: 209). There is a sense that Simon is deliberately taking an irreverent approach to her scholarly sources in order not to be thought stuffy or educational. For instance, Alfi is shocked when Freya has not heard of the poetry of Egill Skallagrimsson, but he is equally shocked she is not acquainted with the work of 'Eyvind the Plagiarist' (2011: 91)! Snot the berserker goes on to recite gory and miserable poetry attributed to 'Audun the Uninspired' and follows it with one of his own compositions: a *reductio ad absurdam* of skaldic verse:

> Eagle food
> Raven food
> Warriors all end up as bloody food. (2011: 92)

The literature of the primary world does not come off much better. Roskva interrupts Freya's recital of the 'To be or not to be' speech from *Hamlet*, complaining that Shakespeare is 'terrible' (2011: 92). The implication is that literary taste is subjective, but the point relies on the reader knowing that the resultant impression that all canonical literature is without merit is a joke. Later on, the reader receives a contrastive moral lesson about the value of a literary education when Freya realizes that she needs to travel to Hel to find Idunn's

apples because she remembers learning a poem at school about 'the apples of Hel' (2011: 149). Education here inculcates useful life skills.

Hel itself is explained using a real-world referent: since there is no time to travel on 'Helveg [...] The dark road to Hel', the companions must enter via the volcano Hekla (2011: 151), and as Freya stands anxiously peering into the mouth of Hekla, we are told 'it was like looking into Mordor' (2011: 169). Obviously, this intertextual reference makes no sense if the reader has not read *The Lord of the Rings*, and Simon thereby situates her novel in relation but also in opposition to Tolkien's.

A more humorous real-world referent is employed when, in trying to bribe the giantess Skadi, Freya offers her a KitKat and tells her that it is 'chocolate [...] the food of the Gods [...]. It makes you happy' (2011: 134). She then distracts Skadi further with a 'quacking duck keyring' that has a glowing light. In a sense this is a bathetic version of the science-fiction premise that what seems to be magic may just be technology that has not yet been explained. The aim is obviously to amuse child readers and make connections with their own lived experience, but the technique also undercuts the seriousness with which the gods are viewed.

Other allusions to Norse myth are folded in unobtrusively, as when the companions come across a 'petrified troll' (2011: 79) and Roskva reminisces about how her master Thor tricked the dwarf Alviss, alluding to the dénouement of *Alvíssmál*, or when the companions spend the night inside a giant's glove, alluding to Thor's journey to the realm of Útgarðaloki (2011: 113). Similarly, when Skadi urinates in the river through which the companions are trying to escape (2011: 155), this perhaps refers to Loki's accusation that the 'daughters of Hymir' urinated on Njörðr in *Lokasenna* (Larrington 1996: 90), or Snorri Sturluson's explanation of *Þórsdrápa* in *Skáldskaparmál* where the giantess Gjálp impedes Thor by swelling a river to spate with her urine (*SnE* 1998: I, 25). Norse cosmology is briefly referenced in the squirrel Ratatoskr's appearance as a messenger from the eagle at the top of Yggdrasil to Nidhogg the dragon at its roots, bringing insults back and forth (2011: 179). These insults are not as visceral and sexualized as the curses in *Skírnismál*, but involve childlike insults such as 'You've got the head of a chicken and the courage of a sheep' (2011: 180). Because of these less prominent allusions, those readers already well-versed in Norse myth will have a different kind of reading pleasure from novices in the field, as Heather O'Donoghue has pointed out in a different context (O'Donoghue 2007: 190–95).

Simon does not always leave Norse myths as she found them, however, instead choosing sometimes to merge or manipulate them for her own pur-

poses. This is most obviously seen in her decision to present the gods not in their mythological heyday but in extreme old age and ill health (the same motif is discussed in Chapter 6.2 above). When Freya first meets Woden, she wonders: 'How could this doddery, broken-backed wreck be Woden the Much-Wise, Father of Magic, Giver of Victory, Lord of Poetry?' (2011: 47). She discovers that the story she knows from 'the sacred Edda' (2011: 56), where Idunn was rescued and the gods' youth restored, never occurred; rather this was a face-saving myth spread about by the shamed and impotent gods. This narrative conceit also, however, provides a rationale and justification for Simon's alterations to the Norse myths she uses. One particularly interesting example is the gods' description of Ragnarök as an apocalypse, where the emphasis is not on epic confrontation and on fiery destruction, but rather on ice and water. Freya is told

> when we die the weeping world will die with us. The ice is melting [...]. The waters are rising. The Frost Giants will rise up, freed from their icy bonds. Then the Axe-Age and the Wind-Age and the Wolf-Age will be upon the earth. (2011: 59)

This description is a complex mix of imagery from *Völuspá*'s account of Ragnarök, and from the myth of Baldr's death in *Gylfaginning*, where all the world (except Loki) weeps for the god. Here the world's tears are for all the gods, represented as melting ice and rising waters that surely allude to the predicted results of global warming in our world.

The decrepitude of the gods is explicitly attributed to the loss of Idunn's apples of immortality, but it is also connected to the fact that they are no longer worshipped (2011: 55), and this may stem from a trope popularized by Rudyard Kipling in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) in his depiction of the reduced status of Wayland Smith, diminished from god to roadside blacksmith (Kipling 1993: 15–17). However, it seems probable that Kipling derived this concept from a passage in Walter Pater's essay on Pico della Mirandola in *The Renaissance* (first published 1873). In it Pater cites Heine's discussion of the decline of the *Greek* gods in 'The Gods in Exile' (from Heine's revised 1853–54 German translation; Phillips 1986: 21, 161), and Simon could well be drawing on Heine himself, given that her epigraph is taken from Emma Jones's classically influenced poem 'Daphne' (Jones 2009).[15] As well as a potential classical

[15] The quotation reads: 'The gods die, | or never lived. They crawl home, damp and slow, | to the subtle, shallow sea that made them' (Simon 2011, n. p.). As the title suggests, the poem is in the voice of the nymph who becomes a tree to escape from the pursuit of Apollo.

allusion, however, Simon introduces a nice linguistic turn when she has Freya pity 'the wrecked, racked Gods shaking before her' (2011: 50). The half-rhyme here provides a cracked echo of the Norse *ragnarök*, and identifies the gods' fallen state as the beginning of the end.

One final instance of familiarization and undercutting is more troubling in terms of its gender dynamic, and that is Simon's depiction of Hel as 'a young girl' whose flesh is rotting as she lies in bed (2011: 186–87), but whose main concern is that 'I never get out, I have no friends, in fact, everyone hates me' (2011: 192). Admittedly, Hel has 'to spend my time with gangrenous, rotting raven food', but otherwise her worries are those of a teenaged girl who thinks nostalgically of 'when I lived with my mother'. She is 'glad the gods are dying [because] they kidnapped me when I was a child', but she is persuaded to help Freya when the other girl puts her hair up with a tortoiseshell clip and gives her a precious 'shiny silver pot of pink lipgloss — Bubble Gum Burst' (2011: 197). It would appear the mistress of the underworld's main concern is to be thought 'pretty' (2011: 196), and this seems a reductive attitude to the character's potential to explore a more positive or even transformative feminist response to teenage body issues and self-esteem. It seems a missed opportunity, matched in the retreat from Freya's independent resourcefulness at the end of the novel.[16]

Indeed, it seems Simon herself wanted space to create a more nuanced portrayal of her teenage Hel, since in 2016 she published *The Monstrous Child*, a first-person past tense narrative from Hel's own perspective, her 'word-shrine' and 'testament' (2016: 6). The body of the novel is devoted to Hel's birth and troubled upbringing, and the vengeful fury kindled when she is kidnapped by Odin and exiled to the Underworld, and which she nurses alongside her obsessive crush on Baldr. Here, Hel's putative monstrosity is linked to tropes of disability ('I heard the names they called me behind their hands. Cripple girl'; 2016: 53), and, in this novel, Simon has space to explore Hel's damaged childhood and vulnerable self-image, as well as themes of power and responsibility (2016: 98), myth and history (2016: 22, 133–35) and storytelling

[16] In the sequel *The Lost Gods* (2013) Thor, Woden and Freyja come to London and cause comical chaos, Woden winning a popular talent show, Freyja remaking the fashion industry's standard of beauty and Thor becoming a premier league star, until Freya manages to persuade her namesake and the other gods to move against the Frost Giants. Simon reworks the plot of *Þrymskviða* to comic effect at the dénouement, but as a whole the book is most interested in skillfully skewering the current obsession with fame for fame's sake. At the end Freya still longs for normalcy, though Woden's injunction remains in her head to 'Act in a way which will be long remembered when life is over' (Simon 2013: 330).

(2016: 20, 134, 153, 158). Moreover, Simon is able to delineate convincingly Hel's emotional trajectory. Hel begins as a preternaturally intelligent child from a broken home, isolated with a bundle of difficult emotions she does not fully understand. It is her encounter with the human Freya (not introduced here until page 245) that triggers her development into a young adult who comes to understand the difference between infatuation and love, the value of kindness and the hollowness of revenge. Simon does not lecture on the fraught process of constructing a positive self-image for teenage girls (and boys), but she embodies it in Hel, and leaves the reader with questions they can explore for themselves (2016: 269). Her final emphasis is on the importance of choosing love rather than hate, life over death (2016: 283) and the promise of hope and renewal (2016: 286–87).

In several respects, Simon's work parallels Joanne Harris's longer and more complicated books *Runemarks* (2007) and *Runelight* (2011).[17] Harris takes even further the mockery of organized religion we see at the start of *The Sleeping Army* and develops a whole cosmology based in part on Norse mythology inflected by principles of pluralism and relativism. Harris's created cosmos is not always entirely consistent, partly because of the length and complexity of the novels and partly because, as medievalists are painfully aware, any sense of Norse mythology as a coherent unity is itself illusory. However, what is interesting about both Simon and Harris as representatives of transformational fantasy is that they both negotiate questions of how to turn a disparate set of mythological materials into a pluralistic world-view which can challenge the dominant religious ideologies whilst at the same time finding points of contact with the lived experience of modern children. Although I have concentrated here on *The Sleeping Army*, as I have written elsewhere, children's medievalist fantasy as a whole explores important contemporary issues such as gender, the environment and the value of difference (whether cultural or religious) and self-empowerment by the decision to choose heroism over cowardice, loyalty over treachery, self-sacrifice over selfishness (Clark 2013: 112). Since transformational fantasy seems to have become the dominant mode of engagement with Norse literature and culture for contemporary children's authors, and thus

[17] For discussion of more radical approaches to gender and other controversial issues in children's literature, see Clark (2013: 112), Pugh (2011) and Reynolds (2007). There is room for a study of gender, race and sexuality in medievalist fiction, and also of the Viking past as heritage in children's fiction set and/or published in North America and particularly Canada. Several Canadian novels feature Viking revenants (Mowatt 1966; Katz 1995; Slade 1997, 1998, 2000).

for children, it is important that academics working on Old Norse are aware of what they are doing and how this may affect perceptions of the subject both in the popular sphere and also amongst students. These books represent an opportunity to engage in an ongoing living dialogue with authors and child audiences and perhaps to encourage some of the latter to follow these issues further into the source texts and culture themselves.

Coda

There are, however, other reasons to engage with these books, which makes their relative neglect unfortunate. For there is a double or triple exclusion at work where the topic of this chapter is concerned. As researchers in the wider field of children's literature have pointed out, modernists and postmodernists alike have tended to ignore the genre, assuming that it is both intellectually inferior and technically conservative. In fact, experimental literary techniques were adopted very early on by children's authors, and the radical and innovative potential of children's literature has been recognized by critics like Walter Benjamin (Reynolds 2011: 5 and ch. 1). However, both medieval and children's literature specialists have tended to ignore or sideline medievalist children's literature. It is striking, for instance, that both Tison Pugh and Seth Lehrer's recent books on children's literature (Pugh 2011; Lehrer 2009) confine themselves to works that are acknowledged either as canonical or as commercially successful, with no mention at all of medievalist fiction.

However, many of these medievalist works have something genuinely interesting to say: both on issues that confront children and adolescents, and on medieval texts and culture. Moreover, although the impression is often given that academics and writers of fiction occupy very distinct spheres, this is not always the case: particularly in this field, the spheres intersect. Authors often have academic interests or connections — for instance, Diana Wynne Jones was the wife of the medieval scholar John Burrow, and Verlyn Flieger writes on medievalism as well as publishing medievalist fiction (Flieger 2002). Jones, Philip Pullman and Rosemary Sutcliff have written about the process of writing historical fiction from an analytical point of view (Jones 1997; Pullman 2001; Sutcliff 2001). As well as verse and children's literature, Kevin Crossley-Holland has also published well-regarded translations of *Beowulf* and other Old English texts (Crossley-Holland 1999, 1967 and 1984), and the work on Norse mythology already discussed, in which he acknowledges direct influence from Bruce Mitchell, Hermann Pálsson, Barbara Leonie Picard and W. H. Auden (Crossley-Holland 1993: i–xli). A similarly scholarly approach to writ-

ing children's and Young Adult fiction is taken by Alan Garner and others (Clark 2013: 102–03). Furthermore, it has become increasingly apparent that a large proportion of students of medieval studies and faculty first become interested in the Middle Ages as children and adolescents through reading works of medievalism, whether that is through Victorian novels, Lewis and Tolkien or the fiction of Alan Garner and Diana Wynne Jones. It follows, then, that one ought to reflect on the assumptions and expectations which students and academics bring to medieval texts, and which influence their intellectual trajectories. In pragmatic terms, medievalism provides an alternative route into other areas of the field in terms of student recruitment. Finally, as Rob Pope has demonstrated, engaging in 'textual intervention' and then accounting for the effects of the changes one has made can be an excellent way of understanding how a text works (Pope 2005), and the same follows for analyzing the textual interventions of others. Examining the ways in which contemporary authors rewrite and rework Norse texts and culture can allow academics and students alike to see the subject from a productively different perspective and encourage them to ask new questions of both the present and the past.

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This bibliography is divided into the generic categories discussed in the chapter, plus sections for non-Norse primary texts and secondary literature. Within the generic categories, items are listed in chronological order, except where this would interrupt a series. Items mentioned or discussed in the chapter are prefaced with an asterisk; all other items are included to give the reader an overview of the category concerned.

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6.3.2 – Norse Mythology in Nordic Children's Literature 1970–2012

Anne-Kari Skardhamar

Introduction

The Norwegian author Tor Åge Bringsværd (2002) claims in the postscript of his book *Den store boken om norrøne guder* ('The Big Book about Norse Gods') that the Nordic pre-Christian myths, the old stories about the gods Odin, Tor, Balder, Frøya and Loke, are an essential part of Nordic culture, and that these stories deserve to be kept alive. It is a question of having *roots*. Moreover, in Bringsværd's opinion, Norse mythology is among the most exciting, original and thought-provoking attempts ever to describe our inner and outer reality — to catch life and existence in words and poetic images. On the cover of his book, Bringsværd highlights the importance of imagination when he states that curiosity and imagination were the qualities that once at the beginning of time made us into human beings. He claims that without imagination we will be unable to understand ourselves or each other.

The aim of this chapter is to explore how pre-Christian myths from Norse mythology are represented in children's literature in the Nordic countries and to present a survey of the subject, discussing a selection of literary texts published in the five Nordic languages: Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic and

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The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume II: From c. 1830 to the Present, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 401–416
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.115709

Faroese. Children's novels, short narrative texts, picture books and cartoons have been selected according to three categories of representation: adaptation, intertextuality and transformation. This process may elucidate aspects of the reception of Old Norse myths and the creative use of these myths in Nordic children's literature from the 1970s up until 2012.

The Sources of Norse Mythology and Religion

The Poetic Edda has usually been regarded as the beginning of the rich tradition of Old Norse literature.[1] The texts of the Edda are thought to have survived in oral tradition for centuries before being written down. The collection contains two groups of poems: one about gods and the other one about heroes. Among the heroic poems the most prominent is the collection of narrative compositions about Sigurd Fåvnesbane, the hero who killed the dragon Fåvne, and about the lives and destiny of Sigurd's kin. The poems about gods are most probably to be regarded as mythical narratives and descriptions belonging to the upper classes rather than cult texts for religious worship.[2] In them the gods seem to have been understood as behaving like human beings, only on a larger scale. In some texts the gods are described with a tinge of humour as in *Þrymskviða* ('The Poem of Þrym'). The Poetic Edda also contains a great poem of apocalyptic vision, *Völuspá* ('The Sybil's Prophecy'), and poetry of wisdom and advice on how to live and behave, in *Hávamál* ('The Speech of the High One', probably intended as the god Odin). Most of the Edda poems have been handed down in an Icelandic vellum manuscript, GKS 2365 4to, which originates from the second half of the thirteenth century and is dated *c.* 1270. The book is known as the Codex Regius, the king's codex, and first came to light in modern times in the seventeenth century, being sent from Iceland as a gift to the king of Denmark in 1662. In 1971 the Codex Regius was returned to Iceland.

The Edda poems about the gods are supplemented by the book attributed to the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), also called *Edda*,[3] and nowadays distinguished as *The Younger Edda*, *The Prose Edda* or Snorri's *Edda*. This work was written about AD 1222–25 as a textbook in the art of skaldic or court

[1] On the Poetic Edda and its reception and presentation of Old Norse myth, see Chapter 2.2.1 in Volume I of this study.

[2] There are many hypotheses about the origin and purpose of the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda, and neither their genesis nor their intended audiences are known for certain.

[3] For an explanation of why both sources are called *Edda*, see Volume I, 'Introduction: Some Key Technical Terms'.

poetry. Snorri made the first adaptation of the poetic Old Norse mythological texts as he retold the stories in prose. One of the intentions behind Snorri's *Edda* was to teach new generations of readers and poets stories from the old mythology as a key to understanding literary references and poetic metaphors.[4]

Furthermore Snorri's *Edda* and *Heimskringla*, containing chronicles of the Norwegian kings, usually also attributed to Snorri, are supplemented by the Latin history of the kings of Denmark by the scholar and cleric Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote about the year 1200. His first nine books contain stories of gods and heroes of Scandinavia's and Denmark's legendary past, concluding with the death of the tenth-century Danish king, Gorm the Old. In spite of his clerical position, Saxo shows a highly unclerical interest in all ancient stories and included as many as possible in his books, though he allows himself certain liberties in order to compose a congruent narrative and chronicles of the ancient Danish kings.

Twentieth-Century Retellings of the Myths of Nordic Religion Mainly for Adult Audiences

In the course of time a number of experts on medieval Nordic literature, religion and mythology have retold the stories of the two Eddas with the same audience in mind as Snorri Sturluson, that is, adaptations for adult readers and writers. One of the most remarkable of these adaptations in the twentieth century was written in 1927 by Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948), who was professor of religious history at the University of Copenhagen. The book *Nordiske Myter og Sagn* ('Nordic Myths and Legends') was republished in 1941 and again in 1973. In the introduction to his book Vilhelm Grønbech refers to Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus as sources of information about the old Nordic religion, and he also includes a reference to the Old English heroic poem *Beowulf*, which is set in Scandinavia and may have been composed as early as about AD 700. It describes the life and destiny of the Geatish (West Swedish) hero Beowulf, his help to the Danes in their dealings with the malevolent creature Grendel and the tragic end to Beowulf's life in a battle with a dragon. How the material for this heroic poem came to England is not evident, but an English poet must have made it into an elaborate epic that preserves the ancient spirit and the old Norse imagery in style in a remarkable way, while

[4] On Snorri's and his medieval audiences' reception of Norse myths and religion, see Volume I, Chapter 2.2.2.

reflections and impulses from Christian culture may also be noticed (Grønbech 1973: 16).

On the cover of the 1973 edition, Vilhelm Grønbech's adaptation is described as a *genial gendigtning af det oldnordiske sagnstoff, en genfortælling i moderne sprog, men i den gamle ånd. Vilhelm Grønbech betragtede det danske og norsk-islandske sagnstof som nordboernes fælleseje [...]. Til sammen danner disse Sagn og Myter virkelig en national ærværdig, hedensk Bibel for Norden. Dets gamle Testamente* ('a brilliant retelling of the old Nordic myths in modern language, but in the ancient spirit. Vilhelm Grønbech regarded the Danish and Norwegian-Icelandic myths as the shared heritage of the Scandinavians [...]. Regarded as a whole these myths and legends constitute a national heathen bible for the Nordic countries, their Old Testament').[5]

Vera Henriksen is a Norwegian author of historical novels for adults and children. In 1988 she published *Eventyrsagaen* ('The Fairytale Saga') about the three children of a Viking hero to whom a member of their father's crew tells an exciting story about a journey eastwards along the major rivers of Russia. She also published a book on Norse myths, *Verdenstreet: Mennesker og makter i Odins tid* ('The World Tree: Men and Powers in Odin's Time', 1993), in which she explores the myths of the Old Nordic religion from a contemporary human perspective in order to find out what they can tell us about our forefathers, their lives, their fears, their hopes and desires. The book aims at any reader, adults as well as young people, as it is not especially adapted to children. Vera Henriksen's idea is that the pre-Christian Nordic religion reflects deep layers of the human mind, layers that may also come to the surface in human relationships and thereby make it easier for people of our time to understand. It has been important to her (Henriksen 1992: 9) to see the myths as a meaningful religion for humans centuries ago, a religion which provides answers in the form of myths to the ever-valid questions of life and fate.

In Denmark Peter Madsen successfully retold stories from Norse mythology and described the universe of the Norse gods in graphic and comic detail in his award-winning cartoon series *Valhalla*. The first album was published in 1979 and the fifteenth and latest volume, *Vølvens syner* ('The Visions of the Sibyl') in 2009. Several of Peter Madsen's cartoons have been published in translation in other European languages, for instance, *Thors brudefærd* ('Thor's Wedding',

[5] All translations from Scandinavian languages are the author's own, unless otherwise signalled. For an assessment of Grønbech's theoretical background and reception of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion, see Chapter 10.1 in this volume.

1980), based on the eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, which has been translated from Danish and published in eleven different languages, among them Norwegian and Faroese. In 2012 the fifteen cartoon albums were published in Denmark in one big hard-cover book.[6]

The Danish author and philosopher Villy Sørensen has adapted Norse myths in his *Ragnarok: En gudefortelling* (1982) ('The Downfall of the Gods'), a retelling of the legends in a way that offers new perspectives on the old stories, the gods and their actions by alluding to contemporary ethical and political dilemmas.[7] In an article in an anthology about the significance of Old Norse literature for national ideas (Lassen 2008), Villy Sørensen's book is characterized as an allegory of the rich world's exploitation of the unprivileged parts of the world. The giants are described by Sørensen as a peace-loving people who try to stop violent attacks by the martial gods. Accordingly, Ragnarok is presented as the giants' revenge on the gods by destroying the world. An illustration of the atomic cloud connects the myth to the contemporary political situation (Lassen 2008: 12). The gods (*æsir*) are described as blond and blue-eyed, whereas their opponents, the Vanir (Norse fertility gods), are dark-haired and brown-eyed. Surprisingly, the main character in Sørensen's book is Loke, who behaves like a calm and reasonable politician, highly skilled in negotiation. Sørensen's sympathy with the Vanir illustrates the slogan 'make love, not war' from the 1970s and is a modern attitude different from that of Snorri Sturluson. Sørensen's Ragnarök is not succeeded by a new world but ends with extinction, as it is illustrated with a second even clearer illustration of the atomic cloud. Sørensen's updated mythological narrative is not tragic but realistically discouraging, not preaching but warning.

In the wake of the book's publication there was a debate in Danish newspapers which succeeded in demonstrating how seriously one still may take the interpretation of Norse mythology. Nevertheless, Sørensen's book is fiction and not a scholarly theory of mythology. The myths are interlinked and presented in everyday Danish like a children's book *naivistisk forførende* ('naively seductive') (Lundgreen-Nielsen 2008: 92). Even if Villy Sørensen's book is not especially adapted to child readers, it can be read by children as well as adults. The story is first and foremost for adults, but it is also suitable for children, who will spontaneously experience the colourful tale of our Nordic gods and giants.

[6] See Chapter 7.1 below for further discussion and illustrations of the *Valhalla* series.

[7] On this work in the context of literary modernism's use of Norse myths, see Chapter 6.1.1 above.

Adaptations for Young Readers

Norse myths have also been retold and adapted in various ways especially for children and young people, although a rigid distinction between retellings for children and adults cannot be maintained. The authors' aims have mainly been to entertain as well as to teach by handing down narratives from their shared Nordic cultural heritage to new generations. The Norwegian author of children's literature, Zinken Hopp, has retold, explained and interpreted myths from the Poetic Edda in *Odin og Tor: Norrøn mytologi for barn* ('Odin and Thor: Norse Mythology for Children', 1984). This book contains ten stories with black and white illustrations by Tor Morisse. Zinken Hopp's collection begins with a story of how Wotan, a wild and terrible Teutonic god of warfare, became Odin, a mighty yet fair and sensible Nordic god, who discovered the well of Mimir, where he bought himself wisdom. The postscript of the book includes information for children about the sources of Nordic religion and a discussion of the question: 'What did our forefathers believe?' with references to the Poetic Edda, to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and to *Heimskringla*'s chronicles of the Norwegian kings. Zinken Hopp also refers to Saxo Grammaticus, who tells about the ancient gods, but interprets them as *noen luringer og bedragere* ('unreliable people and swindlers'). Hopp's adaptations of Norse mythology for children have a didactic purpose and end by assuring the reader that the belief in the old Norse gods was not a religion in today's sense of the word, as there was no sharp dividing line between faith and fiction, no sacred dogmas to refer to, nor any conditions for eternal punishment or salvation, nor even any eternity (Hopp 1984: 87).

An outstanding example of adaptations of Norse myths for young readers is a Norwegian series of children's books by Tor Åge Bringsværd, who retells stories from Norse mythology from Snorri's *Edda*. Bringsværd's adapted mythological stories were published in thirteen picture books from 1985 to 1995, and each book had its own illustrator with their own characteristic style. The picture books were later collected, re-edited and published in a single illustrated volume: *Den store boken om norrøne guder* (2002). In his foreword Tor Åge Bringsværd claims that *myter og eventyr blir aldri uaktuelle. For de handler ikke bare om 'den gang' og 'den tid'. De kan like gjerne fortelle om 'hver gang' og 'all tid'. Men hver generasjon må likevel erobre dem på nytt. Holde dem opp og sile dem i lyset fra sin egen hverdag* ('myths and fairytales will never be without interest. They deal not only with *then* and *that time*, but can equally well tell about *every time* and *always*. Nevertheless, every generation must experience them anew, lift them up and sift them in the light of their own time').

The Icelandic authors Ingunn Ásdísardóttir (text) and Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir (illustrations) published the picture book *Örlög guðanna: Sögur úr norrænni goðafræði* ('The Fates of the Gods: Stories from Norse Mythology') in 2008. The Icelandic book is conceptualized in ways that may be compared to the picture books by Tor Åge Bringsværd. The aim of the Norwegian as well as the Icelandic book is to retell the ancient Norse myths to children of the twenty-first century. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir and Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir adapt, revive, implicitly explain and humorously retell thirty stories from Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and present them in a picture book with fifteen colourful double-page illustrations. The authors state in their blurb that *Norræn goðafræði geymir mergjaðar sögur* ('Norse mythology contains strong stories') which have been retold for more than a thousand years. The book describes this world from its creation from the body of the frost giant Ymir and up to the big battle of Ragnarok. We hear about Odin and Thor, the siblings Frey and Freyja, the goddesses Idunn and Frigg, the mischief-maker Loke Laufeyjarson and several other colourful gods and goddesses, dwarves, giants and other mythic figures.

Other examples include several new Icelandic picture books that have been published by the same publisher, Mál og menning. Among the most interesting of these are two picture-book adaptations from the Poetic Edda. One of these is *Völuspá* ('The Sibyl's Prophecy', 2005), a picture-book version of the grand old visionary epic poem *Völuspá*, a story about the creation of the world, then the Norse gods and the first human beings, the end of the world at Ragnarok and the coming of a new world. The other adaptation from the *Edda* is a picture-book version of *Hávamál* ('Sayings of the High One', 2011). *Hávamál* contains ancient words of wisdom handed down by generations of transmitters of Nordic culture. The authors of the two books are Þórarinn Eldjárn (text) and Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir (pictures), and they introduce Norse mythology to children of all ages in playful verses and striking pictures in splendid books which are said to be suitable for all the family.

The humorous narrative about the god Thor and his wedding is one of the most popular stories from the Poetic Edda, and it has been adapted in several versions in Nordic children's literature. One example is a Danish picture book by Erik Hjorth Nielsen (2008), *Hugin & Munin fortæller om Tors brudefærd* ('Hugin and Munin Tell the Story of Thor's Wedding'), Hugin and Munin being the names of Odin's two ravens. Another Danish adaptation of a story about the god Thor, though with a different plot, is Ib Spang Olsen's picture book *Thors reise til Udgård* ('Thor's Journey to Udgård, 1975), Udgård being the home of the giant-like being Útgarða-Loki.

Another Danish author, Nils Hartmann, has retold the stories of *Odin og de andre guder* ('Odin and the Other Gods', 2007a) in an easy reader for very young children, *for dig, der lige har lært at læse* ('for you, who have just learnt to read'). Hartmann has also published two small illustrated pedagogical adaptations of Norse mythology (*læsepædagogisk bearbejdelse*) for children in their first two years at school: *Balders død* ('The Death of Balder', 2007b) and *Fenrisulven* ('The Fenris Wolf', 2007c). The books contain eight to ten stories about the gods and their lives, with accounts of conflicts, challenges, trespasses, punishments and finally their destinies.

The Icelandic anthology *Auga Óðins: Sjö sögur úr norrænni goðafræði* ('The Eye of Odin. Seven Stories from Norse Mythology') represents a special mode of adaptation. This book was published in Reykjavík in 2007 by the publishing house Mál og menning in cooperation with the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), and it consists of seven narratives based on Old Norse myths. Seven different authors and illustrators are represented, and each story starts with a double-page illustration in black and white. Some of the authors retell the legends in the traditional mode of adaptation as in the chapter *Loki bundin* ('Loki Bound'), where the story is of how Loki, the mischief-maker who is a hybrid between a god and a giant, was caught and punished, and how his wife Sigyn helped him to survive. The author lets his characters remain in the prehistoric period, as in Snorri's *Edda*. However, some of the seven authors in *Auga Óðins* move the mythological content into a present-day setting, whereas others bridge the gap between an ancient and a contemporary setting. The illustrations indicate when the action takes place. For instance, in the chapter *Ragnarök* (pp. 137–38) two boys with short hair and present-day clothes are playing a computer game called 'Ragnarök' in which they take part in a battle in the Viking Age. The text describes the kind of catastrophe that takes place in the world of the twelve-year-old boys Odin and Ægir (the latter named after the Norse god of the sea). A computer is also present in the chapter *Stjörnur í augun* (pp. 94–95) where the boy character Freyr (cf. Frøy, the god of fertility) looks at a photo on the internet of the girl he fancies. In the story *Loki fer í afmælisveislu* ('Loke Goes to a Birthday Party') a boy called Loki tries to hide in order to avoid going to a birthday party, but his mother finds him by calling him on his mobile phone. All the party guests are children with mythological names, and Loki, the only one who is different, and therefore has to suffer and endure contempt and insulting remarks about his ethnic origin, eventually runs away from the party.

Intertextuality

Another group of texts involving Norse myths concerns narratives in which the myths are compared in various ways to narratives of life in the medieval Nordic countries or are merged into the contemporary world of the child reader. An excellent example is the Danish author Lars-Henrik Olsen's four-volume set of novels about the young hero Erik in *Erik Menneskesøn* ('Eric, Son of Mankind', 1986), *Kampen om sværdet* ('The Battle for the Sword', 1991/98), *Kvasers blod* ('The Blood of Kvasir', 1996/98) and *Gudernes skæbne* ('The Fate of the Gods', 2006). Olsen's novels about the boy Erik are brilliant examples of how children's books in the fantasy genre may serve a double end: to please and to instruct. The novels all have the same heroic protagonist who has to endure hardship. There are exciting actions, fantastic elements and love stories, and all the books retell narratives from Norse mythology, and by doing so, teach and highlight stories from Norse mythology as part of the common Nordic cultural heritage.

The story is told from Erik's perspective. He is a realistic figure, a boy of nearly fourteen, who lives with his parents in a village in Denmark. His first transition from the real world to the fantasy world of Norse mythology happens when he is home alone on a summer night on which there is a severe thunderstorm. He feels uneasy and more and more afraid as the thundering escalates. He vaguely recollects some old legends about a god who rode across the sky in a carriage pulled by two billy-goats. All of a sudden there is a flash of lightning and a big man appears. He wears a helmet and a coat of mail and is armed with a huge hammer. The man opens the garden gate, introduces himself as Tor (Thor) and calls on Erik to join him to fly to Åsgard, the home of the gods. He gives Erik a lecture on Norse cosmology and the world of the gods. When they are on their way to the other world, Tor explains that he wants Erik, the son of mankind, to help solve a problem in Åsgard, where things are now out of order, and Odin is no longer capable of being a strong and wise leader. The giants are soon likely to invade Åsgard and bring about Ragnarok, the end of the world. Tor declares that Erik is the only one who can save them, and time is short. He gives Erik a survey of Norse mythology, and the enormous castle of Valhall is described in detail, and so is life, food, customs and the inhabitants of Valhall. Trud, the daughter of Tor, becomes Erik's best friend, his special girlfriend and fellow problem-solver. Erik's challenge is to solve the problem of the gods' decline: that because the goddess Idun has been kidnapped by the giants, and accordingly the gods no longer are in possession of Idun's magic golden apples, the strength they need to control their arch-enemy has declined. With Trud as his companion Erik sets out on a dangerous journey through the land

of the giants in order to find Idun and prevent Ragnarok. They succeed in their mission and return happily to Valhall, where Tor and his wife Sif approve of their relationship. Erik goes back to his home in the human world for this time. However, he later visits the world of the Norse gods several more times to solve other problems and prevent Ragnarok happening, and every time his transition from one world to the other is new and beyond his control.

The title of the fourth novel in the series of Erik, the son of mankind, is *Gudernes skæbne* ('The Destiny of the Gods') with the subtitle *En forjættende rejse i den nordiske gudeverden* ('A Promising Journey into the Nordic Gods' World'). The transition happens when Erik is on holiday in Iceland and loses consciousness when there is an earthquake and an awful flood. He wakes up in Åsgard. Again the struggle between gods and giants is dramatic, and there is a fight between Tor and the dragon, Midgardsormen, which blows poison and fire. All signs show that Ragnarok is near. However, like the three previous ones, this book has a happy ending.

In another Danish book series set in the Viking period, *Den grønne Ø* ('The Green Island'), written by Mette Finderup in 2012–13, the protagonist is the fourteen-year-old Viking girl, Gyrith. The books are an entertaining and accurate retelling of several of the most important tales of Norse mythology and are recommended for young readers from eleven to fifteen years. The first volume, *Smertensbarn* ('The Child of Pain', 2012), tells the story of how the headstrong young girl accidentally kills one of the cats belonging to the Norse goddess Frøya. As a consequence the girl is cursed by the goddess. The curse decrees that everyone Gyrith ever comes to love will be taken away from her. In order to prevent the curse from harming the village, the girl's parents consider sending her away. In the second volume, *Blodvarslet* ('Warned by Blood', 2013), the girl escapes to Ireland in the guise of a bird, and for the first time meets her biological parents who are a king and queen. Both books were praised by the critics as 'fantastic reading', and *Blodvarslet* was characterized as 'a journey into a "real" and mythical medieval universe' where

> the magic is more present than before. In *Blodvarslet* we meet old Irish spirits who compete with the Norse gods for their position, as the Christian faith pushes them into the background. As things escalate the feeble Fionne and the slaves whom she has looked down on for a long time are the only ones Gyrith can trust. (Arguimbau 2013).

Another example is the Norwegian author Torill Thorstad Hauger's books about two Irish children aged ten and eleven, who were captured by Norwegian Vikings and kept as slaves: *Røvet av vikinger* ('Captured by Vikings', 1978) and

Flukten fra vikingene ('The Escape from the Vikings', 1979). The action takes place in Norway in the tenth century and is seen from the perspective of the protagonists, who are forced to change their names when they are enslaved and thus lose their identity as well as their freedom. However, they keep alive a dream of escaping. After a year as slaves the two Irish children succeed in fleeing. They manage to hide on board a ship bound for Iceland, and achieve their liberty and a better life as free workers on the farm of a friendly Norwegian immigrant family. Furthermore, in a monastery in Iceland they meet a kind Irish monk whom they know from home. The books of Torill Thorstad Hauger describe children in distress in the early period of transition from heathen to Christian religion in Norway and Iceland.

Norse mythology is frequently referred to in these three novels, as the Norse pagan pantheon, myths and heroic narratives are represented as an integral part of Viking society. For example, one of the old slaves in *Røvet av vikinger* informs the Christian Irish children about the necessity of sacrificing to the heathen gods (1987: 74) and describes the positions and the functions of the goddess Frøya and of the gods Odin and Tor (1978: 75), and Frøya is called upon (1978: 116). The narrative of Sigurd the dragon slayer from the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda is retold and explained (1978: 97). In *Flukten fra vikingene* Frøya's cats are invoked (1979: 13), Frøya is thanked (1979: 16) and Njord, the god of the ocean, is mentioned (1979: 19).

Heathen religious customs are contrasted with the Christian religion in several ways in the three books. Examples from *Røvet av vikinger* illustrate the difference between the religions when one of the servants gives birth to her first child, and the old slave woman reels off a series of runic formulas of birth to help the delivery. Furthermore, the old woman invokes Frøya and all the Norse gods for help, whereas the two Irish slave children stammer their *Pater noster* and other Christian prayers in Latin and call upon God and all the saints to help the young woman to bring forth her baby (1978: 89). The Irish slave girl wears a little wooden cross round her neck and explains to the jarl's wife about Christian churches and monasteries in Ireland. The jarl's wife is surprised that the monks are able to earn their living just by praising their god and by doing agricultural work in the garden of the monastery without going out on Viking raids. The slave girl answers by presenting the Christian ethics she has been taught by their priests: 'no one should steal and kill, and no one ought to do evil to others' (1978: 102, 103).

Torill Thorstad Hauger closed her Viking series with a third book, in which the two Irish slave children play a part, though not as the leading characters. *Sigurd drakedreperen* ('Sigurd the Dragon Slayer', 1982), a continuation of the

previous two books, tells the story of the twelve-year-old son of a medieval jarl. The protagonist Sigurd is named after the hero Sigurd who killed the dragon Fåvne (Fáfnir) in the heroic poem *Fáfnismál* in the Poetic Edda. The two Irish children are slaves on the farm of Sigurd's father. A passage from the eddic poem is retold in prose and printed in italics as a preface to each of the three parts of Thorstad Hauger's novel about Sigurd.

The Viking ideals that influence Sigurd's upbringing as a young man of the aristocracy are a fighting spirit, strength, power and courage. However, Sigurd does not favour his father's ideals. The boy is described as a sensitive, dreamy and artistic soul who enjoys music, appreciates wood-carving and cares for his fellow beings irrespective of their social status. After an unsuccessful Viking raid, Sigurd refuses to accept the role that he is required to play in order to be accepted by society, and he chooses to become the good person he himself wants to be. He defends the Irish slave boy, opposes cruel punishment and wants to set the slaves free. Gradually Sigurd slays a different sort of dragon than his namesake from the Poetic Edda: he identifies the dragon as the destructive forces within himself, forces that he has to master in order to preserve human worth (Birkeland et al. 1997: 376). The novel *Sigurd drakedreperen* was adapted as a film with the same title in 1989.

A Swedish example of books that describe medieval children and also refer to the transition between pagan and Christian religions are three books by the author May Bylock, *Drakskeppet* ('The Dragon Ship') from 1997, *Det gyllne svärdet* ('The Golden Sword') and *Borgen i fjärran* ('The Castle Far Away'), both published in 1998. Bylock's trilogy tells the story of a French girl who was captured as a child by some Swedish Vikings and kept as a slave. The action of the trilogy takes place in the tenth century, and the main character is the girl Petite, who is ten years old in *Dagskeppet*, the first volume of the trilogy. She is the daughter of a knight in the great realm of France, and she has heard rumours of how Vikings from the Nordic countries raid and burn wherever they come. She knows that being captured by the Vikings would be a fate worse than death, and suddenly it happens to her. She is taken on board a Viking ship heading for Sweden together with captives and is sold as a slave. After a short period of hard life as a slave, she succeeds in escaping and hides in the forest, where she is found and taken care of by a good woman who does not have any children of her own. She becomes a daughter to Boel and her husband, but feels that she is an outsider in the village with her black hair and doubts if she will ever be one of them and forget about her home in the castle in France. Petite's name is changed to the Nordic name Åsa.

In the second book about Åsa, *Det gyllne svärdet*, several years have passed, and Åsa goes with her foster father on a journey to visit a Viking chieftain in order to solve the riddle of the meaning of the inscription on his golden sword. Here Åsa meets Torfinn, the son of the viking, who wants to marry her. Åsa interprets the inscription, which is in French, and the young man sets out on a Viking raid. In the third novel, *Borgen i fjärran*, Åsa has grown up, and after a series of complications she marries Torfinn. She wants to liberate the slaves on the Viking farm and succeeds in doing so when she has sailed with her husband to France and revisited her old home, the castle. Her husband then understands the background and the destiny of his wife and gives his consent to let the slaves go free.

Norse mythology is invoked in the trilogy by Bylock as well as in Torill Thorstad Hauger's three novels. In the first volume Petite's foster-mother had been praying and making sacrifices to the goddess Freja in order to have a child, so she was grateful to Freja for her foster daughter Petite. Freja is presented as the goddess responsible for what is born in the human as well as in the animal world (1997: 67). Petite's foster-father prays to Odin when he needs help (1997: 80). Odin is presented as the wisest of all gods and sends out his ravens Hugin and Munin to collect information about what men are up to. Odin rides his horse, Sleipnir, which has eight legs, and it sounds like thunder when he is galloping (1997: 80). Petite's foster-father tells a number of stories about gods of the Norse pantheon: Frej, the god of fertility and the husband of Freja; Loke who is a god and a mischief-maker; Loke's son, the wild Midgard serpent who is coiled around the earth; Tor and his hammer; the god Heimdal, who set up the rainbow; and Ragnarok when the world ends and a new green and wonderful world begins (1997: 93–95). People in the village discuss whether the dark-headed girl Petite has come from the trolls or from the gods. As her foster-father is a rune-master and can make runic inscriptions, which is a kind of magic or wizardry that protects against evil, people in the village argue that the girl must have been sent by the trolls and not by the gods (1998: 88). Like Torill Thorstad Hauger's three Viking books, Bylock's trilogy also describes a tension between the heathen and the Christian religions.

Transformations

There are several books for children and young people in which Norse myths are interwoven, transformed and rewritten into fantasy narratives. One example is the famous Swedish author Astrid Lindgren's narrative in *Bröderna*

Lejonhjärta ('The Lionheart Brothers', 1973), where a fight with a dragon, as in the Poetic Edda, as a metaphor for fighting against the forces of evil, is a central motif in the final chapters. *Ronja Røvardotter* ('Ronja, the Robber's Daughter', 1981) is a kind of a medieval pastiche, in which there are forest trolls that seem to be characters between mythological and fairytale figures inspired by Nordic folklore without specific reference to Norse mythology.

The Danish author Janne Teller has published books for young people, among which the novel *Intet* ('Nothing', 2001), which thematizes existential questions, was awarded a number of children's literature prizes. However, her first novel, *Odins ø* ('Odin's Eye', 1999), is a modern Nordic saga, a fairytale for adults, a political and religious parable or allegory, a contemporary saga about belief, doubt, courage, love and about modern society and the Nordic countries of today.

A rewriting of the legendary Norse motif of a hero fighting a dragon occurs in the Faroese picture book, *Veiða vind: Eitt tónleikaævintýr* ('Hunting the Wind: A Musical Fairytale', 2011). The title contains a pun, as 'wind' may be the child's misunderstanding of the word *hind* (a female deer), which occurs in Faroese medieval ballads. Furthermore, in the picture book the expression 'hunting wind' may also refer to music, stringed instruments and to a symphony orchestra. The picture book text is by Rakel Helmsdal and the pictures by Janus á Húsagarði. The book tells a story about a little boy, his big brother and their sister, who is a little bit older than the boy himself. The story starts in an everyday contemporary setting and returns to it at the end. The transition into the imagined world happens when the little boy asks his elder siblings to come with him to hunt the wind. They refuse, as they are too busy doing their homework, and the little boy sets out on his own. The ancient Norse motif of the dragon occurs as an intertextual reference to some of the narratives of the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda. Some of these poems about the dragon-slayer were adapted as Faroese medieval ballads, in which the hero Sjurður (Sigurd) killed the dragon and won the golden treasure. A fairylike girl character and a wild bear, both of which frequently occur in Faroese and other Nordic folk-tales, also play a part in the story about the boy who sets out to catch the wind. The journey brings him through four seasons and into the world and the wilderness, until he eventually returns home safe and sound. The tale may also be interpreted as a story about imagination and reality in one creative mixture. The picture book includes a compact disc in which the symphony orchestra of the Faroe Islands plays music by the Faroese composer Kári Bæk. The music illustrates the action represented in the pictures as well as in the narrative text.

Conclusion

The positive reception of the numerous representations of Old Norse mythology in Nordic children's literature may be explained as an aspect of Nordic nation-building. The Norse mythological narratives seem to occur most frequently in Icelandic and Norwegian children's literature, but are referred to in children's books in all the Nordic languages and are presented as adaptations in textbooks and fiction for young readers. Furthermore, tales from Norse mythology have been and still seem to be of importance in strengthening children's and young people's consciousness of their shared Nordic cultural and linguistic heritage and in consolidating the self-image of the Nordic countries as culturally closely related to one another, even though they are independent nations with a long independent history. Children's literature is one way of passing on to new generations the shared Nordic cultural heritage. Medieval mythological narratives are retold and updated, and the readers are sometimes encouraged to discuss the value that pre-Christian myths, ideas and ideals may have in their contemporary society.

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Part 7
The Reception in Mass Culture

Figure 7.1.1: Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem in Madsen 1980: 39.
Reproduced courtesy of Peter Madsens Tegnestue.

7.1 – Nordic Gods and Popular Culture*

Jón Karl Helgason
Translated from the Icelandic by Jane Victoria Appleton

For hu-un er så u-ung og så øøndig ser hun ud ('As she is so young and loo-hooking so adorable'), sings the dog at the piano, smiling out at the guests in a cave-like hall (Madsen 1980: 39). He is part of a quintet entertaining guests at the wedding of goddess Freja and the giant Trym in the comic book *Thors brudefærd* ('Thor's Wedding') by illustrator Peter Madsen (1958–). This is the second in a Danish series called *Valhalla*. The storyline is based on the eddic poem *Þrymskviða* ('The Poem of Thrym'), but the wedding band is borrowed from Jim Henson's television series *The Muppet Show*. In addition to Rowlf the Dog, the band includes members of the Muppets house band, Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem, with the drummer Animal, saxophonist Zoot, bass player Floyd Pepper and keyboardist Dr. Teeth.

But several elements are at odds with the original. Instead of the red cavalry jacket, borrowed from George Harrison on the cover of the Beatles's album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Pepper wears a hessian tunic and plays a lyre. Zoot also plays an old-fashioned instrument that seems to be a cross between a clarinet and a Bronze Age Brudevælte lur. He is almost bald, and the way his pointy ears stick up suggests a common ancestry with hobbits from

* A version of this chapter has been published by the author as Chapter 1, 'Thor: From Superhero to "Kitchin"-Maid' in his *Echoes of Valhalla* (2017: 17–45).

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the fictional world of J. R. R. Tolkien or Vulcans from the television series *Star Trek*. Dr. Teeth, who usually wears colourful top hats, has a blue wizard hat on his head and there is a black gap in his upper gum where his gold tooth normally shines. With reference to the words that Zoot directed towards Charlie Parker in one episode of *The Muppet Show* (Harris 1977), it is easy to imagine Madsen whispering to himself as he finished this frame: 'Forgive me, Jim Henson, wherever you are'.

The *Valhalla* series is one of a great many examples of the afterlife of Nordic mythology in contemporary popular culture. During the past few decades, the pagan gods and goddesses of Ásgarðr have been repeatedly recycled in most media and art forms. The production of this material is not limited to the Northern European nations that have traditionally cultivated this heritage. Influential entertainment companies in North America and South-East Asia have also applied their efforts to this scene, with distribution of the material occasionally reaching all corners of the world. The best known adaptation of this kind is possibly the comic book series about the Mighty Thor, which first appeared during the 1960s in magazines issued by the American publishing company Marvel Comics. These stories, as Halldór Stefánsson (1993: 86) has highlighted, have 'presumably been instrumental in determining many people's conceptions of ancient Nordic mythology in the English-speaking world'. They have become the subject matter of various television series, computer games and films produced by Marvel, and echoes of this production can be discerned in the most diverse places and contexts. A heavy metal band bearing the name Mighty Thor emerged, for instance, in Mexico in 2001 and later released an album entitled *Rumbo Al Valhalla* ('On the Way to Valhalla').

This chapter traces the history, nature and influence of these and some other reincarnations of Nordic myths. As we might gather from the scene in *Thors brudefærd*, in which Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem provide live wedding music in Jötunheimar, such adaptations do not represent 'our historical past so much as they represent our ideas or cultural stereotypes about that past', quoting Fredric Jameson's (1990: 20) analysis of postmodernism and consumer society. But that does not make them any less interesting or important.

> Cultural production has been driven back inside the mind, within the monadic subject: it can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent but must, as in Plato's cave, trace its mental images of the world on its confining walls. If there is any realism left here, it is a 'realism' which springs from the shock of grasping that confinement and of realizing that, for whatever peculiar reasons, we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach. (Jameson 1990: 20)

Emphasis will be placed on distinguishing two kinds of clichés that seem to enjoy considerable circulation in contemporary popular culture: one is that Þórr, by the power of his hammer Mjǫlnir, is the god of thunder, representative of constructive physical strength and masculinity; the other is that pagan men who die in battle are rewarded with eternal life in Valhalla. Both of these conceptions had been developed for quite a long time before they were adapted by makers of popular culture in the twentieth century. The attractiveness of Þórr as a superhero can best be explained with reference to the simple narrative structure of many narratives in the eddic poems and *Snorra Edda* (Prose Edda) that define the giants as the precarious 'Other' in relation to the gods. In Margaret Clunies Ross's words: 'One of Þórr's commonest roles in Old Norse myth is to defend the world of gods and men against the disordering forces represented by the giants and the various monsters that inhabit the peripheral regions of the cosmos' (1994: 258). The popular notion of the Vikings who are eager to die in battle in order to be accepted into Valhalla similarly has its roots in *Snorra Edda* and various other medieval texts, but for the post-medieval reception of this idea Thomas Bartholin's (1616–80) *Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptæ a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis* ('Danish Antiquities Concerning the Causes of the Danes' Contempt of Death') from 1689 became an essential source (cf. Chapter 3.1 in Volume 1 of this study). While both the clichés in question surfaced early on in American films, the former then became a fundamental element in Marvel's stories about the Mighty Thor and the latter a key theme of the heavy metal subgenre known as Viking metal. But in these and other art forms we can also find adaptations that wriggle free of these clichés, either by taking into consideration evidence from medieval Nordic literature or topical modern-day moral concerns, ranging from pacifism to fighting sexism.

The Mighty Thor

The idea of turning Þórr into a superhero is generally attributed to a New York Jew of Romanian descent by the name of Stanley Martin Lieber (1922–2018), better known as Stan Lee, an editor at Marvel Comics. The company was founded by Martin Goodman in 1939 under the name Timely Publications, and it quickly became a big player on the American comic book scene. Among the popular material published by Goodman in the early years were stories about Captain America, a patriotic superhero who was conceived by Jack Kirby (1917–94) and Joe Simon (1913–2011) in 1941. Lee was involved in the making of some of the Captain America stories, but he also took part in creat-

ing characters like the Destroyer and Jack Frost in the 1940s. The creation of Thor was a later occurrence which is habitually traced back to 1960, when DC Comics, a major competitor of Marvel, began publishing a new series of comics called *Justice League of America* in which all the principal superheroes of that company, including Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, play a part. Goodman asked Lee to create a parallel super team for Marvel, and soon he and his colleagues had produced a diverse group of new characters, many of whom would live on for decades. These include Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man and Thor, all of whom were introduced in comic magazines between 1962 and 1963. At around the same time, Marvel began publishing stories under the title of *Earth's Mightiest Heroes: The Avengers* in which three of the aforementioned figures joined Captain America and other superheroes in their struggle against darkness and evil. Involved with Lee in this project were, among others, his younger brother and scriptwriter Larry Lieber (1931–), and Jack Kirby, who illustrated the first Hulk and Iron Man comics (cf. Evanier 2008: 111–63).

Lieber (script) and Kirby (pencils), along with Stan Goldberg (colours), Joe Sinnott (inks) and Artie Simek (letters), worked with Lee on the first story about Thor, which appeared in the comic magazine *Journey into Mystery #83* in August 1962. The cover shows a muscular, blond warrior with a winged helmet, standing on the edge of a high-rise in a modern city, swinging a hammer around. A spaceship hovers above his head, out of which jump armed green stone men, one of them already struck down by the hammer. 'Introducing the Mighty Thor!' is written in large letters to the left of the spaceship, and to the right: 'The most exciting super hero of all time!!'

The feature story was published in the magazine in three different parts: 'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!', 'The Power of Thor' and 'Thor the Mighty Strikes Back!' (here the first title will be used collectively for them all). The storyline, in brief, is that an American doctor, Donald Blake, is travelling through a mountainous region of Norway when the stone men of the cover land their space fleet there. Their mission is to breathe in oxygen, which gives them superhuman powers and would, in the course of time, enable them to conquer the Earth. Blake escapes into a cave where he finds an old wooden cudgel. When he hits it against a stone, the cudgel turns into a hammer and transforms the doctor into Thor, the god of thunder. After practising wielding the hammer by splitting a giant tree trunk, he attacks the enemies, drives them away and saves the day. The story ends with the spaceships flying off, to the great surprise of American NATO soldiers who have taken up a position in the area.

'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!' could be interpreted as a modern adaptation of the myths describing Þórr's struggle against the giants

of Jötunheimar. In *Snorra Edda* we learn that Þórr is *sterkastr allra guðanna ok manna* ('strongest of all the gods and men') (*SnE* 1988: 1, 22; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 22) and that among his possessions is *hamarrinn Mjǫllnir er hrímþursar ok bergrisar kenna þá er hann kemr á lopt, ok er þat eigi undarligt: hann hefir lamit margan haus á feðrum eða frændum þeira* ('the hammer Mjollnir, well known to frost-giants and mountain-giants when it is raised aloft, and that is not to be wondered at, it has smashed many a skull of their fathers and kinsmen') (*SnE* 1988: 1, 23; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 22). In *Þrymskviða*, which describes the consequences of Þórr's hammer being stolen by the giant Þrymr, it emerges that the fate of the Æsir very much depends on Mjöllnir (Neckel and Kuhn 1983: 113): *Þegar muno iotnar | ásgarð búa, | nema þú þinn hamar | þér um heimtir* ('The giants will settle Ásgarðr immediately, unless you reclaim your hammer'). In the comic book, these circumstances are transposed from the world of Nordic mythology to the solar system (Ásgarðr becomes Norway and Jötunheimar Saturn) and linked to American military activity in Northern Europe during the Cold War years. Concurrently, Þórr adopts the split personality of the archetypal superhero who is half the time leading an ordinary life far removed from his role as saviour of mankind. In 'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!' Dr. Blake walks with a cane and, before he finds the cudgel in the cave, his monologue reveals that he is neither brave nor resourceful: 'The cave is so dark — so gloomy — and airless! It seems no human has set foot in here for ages!! (SIGH) I might as well wait for the Stone Men to find me — I-I'm trapped!' (Lee, Kirby and Lieber 1962a). It is only with the aid of the hammer that he changes from a middle-class wimp into a masculine hero. The episode can be associated with *Þrymskviða* where the loss of the hammer leads to Þórr's transformation into a woman. In the eddic poem, Þrymr says he is willing to return the hammer to the gods if he gets to marry the goddess Freyja. When she proves unwilling to do this, the gods dress Þórr in a bridal gown and send him to the wedding in Freyja's place. The plot ends with Mjöllnir being laid in the lap of the bride, who then recovers her/his virile qualities:

Hló Hlórriða	hugr í briósti,
er harðhugaðr	hamr um þecþi:
Þrym drap hann fyrstan,	þursa dróttinn,
oc ætt iotuns	alla lamði. (Neckel and Kuhn 1983: 115)

(Þórr's mind laughed in his breast, when he, unyielding, recognized the hammer; first he killed Þrymr, lord of the monsters, and trashed the giant's family.)

The comparison drawn here does not necessarily mean that Lee, Lieber and Kirby pored over English translations of eddic poetry or *Snorra Edda* before

they began creating the first Mighty Thor comics. In looking for the sources these three consulted, it makes more sense to study earlier American comics in which the Nordic god of thunder plays a significant role. Kirby was involved in several such projects for DC Comics in the 1940s and 1950s, and it is customary to consider these as a part of the creative process that would later bear fruit in his collaboration with the Lieber brothers (cf. Kolkman 2004).

The oldest story, 'The Villain from Valhalla', appeared in *Adventure Comics #75* in the summer of 1942 and was, just like the first Captain America stories, designed by Kirby in collaboration with Joe Simon. Here, superheroes Sandman and Sandy fight a group of Vikings who visit modern-day New York. On the splash page, the bearded leader of the group can be seen standing on the banks of the East River with the Brooklyn Bridge and the Empire State Building in the background. He has pulled Sandy up by the hair and swings his hammer threateningly over Sandman's head. The iconography is the same as on the cover of *Journey into Mystery #83* twenty years later, except that, instead of the space ship and stone men equipped with guns, we have a longship with dragon prow and Vikings armed with swords. At the bottom of the page, the situation is elucidated: 'From the misty caverns of the past rises Thor, ancient god of war [...] no kindness pulses in his body: instead only hate and savage ruthlessness guide him as he invades a modern world [...] wielding his magic hammer [...] he beats a mad tattoo upon the forces of society!' (Kirby and Simon 1942).

Although Thor plays here the role of the rogue and not the superhero, the story is identical to the story told in 'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!' and thousands of other comics: Society struggles against the invasion of an evil force, but before all is lost the hero manages to restore law and order. At the end of the narrative it is revealed that the rogues were not real Vikings from the past, but in fact a group of criminals in disguise. The group's leader is a university professor called 'Fairy Tales' Fenton who has combined his knowledge of mythology and technology to design a bulletproof suit and an electric hammer that can smash police cars and blast bank vaults. Thor is, in other words, just an everyday bank robber, but as Chris Sims (2011) has pointed out, Kirby's decision to present the villain as a Germanic god of battle was meaningful in the context of growing American participation in World War II in 1942:

> Thor, the *blitzkrieging* Norse god that was being held up by the Nazis as the ideal of the Master Race is revealed to be just another common crook who gets the living crap kicked out of him and ends the story in traction, with the Sandman and Sandy

> showing up to mock him in the hospital. Is it any surprise that this is the same artist who introduced Captain America by having him punch Hitler right in the mouth?[1]

Another war-time comic featuring Thor that has been attributed to Kirby and Simon is 'The Shadow of Valhalla' published in *Boy Commandos #7* in the summer of 1944. By that time, both artists had been drafted, and it is therefore uncertain to what degree the story in question, reportedly ghost-written by Don Cameron (1905–54) and ghost-drawn by Louis Cazeneuve (1908–77), is a part of Kirby and Simon's oeuvre (cf. Morrissey 2004). The heroes of the *Boy Commandos* series, which kicked off in 1942, are four orphan boys from France, England, the Netherlands and the United States who, under the leadership of Captain Rip Carter, fight the Axis Powers on different military fronts. In 'The Shadow of Valhalla' the action takes place in a German-occupied Norway, or more specifically in an old building in 'the land of Norse myth' where the commandos are supposed to search for artillery. It turns out that this is the castle of Valhalla, occupied by a Nazi troop. The two parties engage in a battle, causing part of the castle to explode. At that point, the Nordic gods Thor, Frey, Bragi and Heimdall, who all have yellow beards and wear Viking clothing and horned helmets, intervene and bring the intruders to the seat of Odin. The Nazi lieutenant claims that he represents the gods' 'chosen leader, Hitler!' and adds that the commandos 'must be destroyed! Our fuehrer has ordered it! We shall be masters of the world'. But Odin is not impressed. 'Who is this upstart Hitler?' he asks. 'I never chose him for a leader!' At that point Rip Carter explains that 'Hitler has appointed himself master of the world — and now we are fighting his armies in order to be free! We refuse to be slaves!' (Kirby and Simon 1944). Odin decides to settle the matter between the commandos and the Germans by one-on-one combat, which Carter luckily wins, granting him and the boys safe passage to 'the world of life', while Thor uses his hammer to dispatch the Nazis 'to the world of darkness' (Kirby and Simon 1944). At the end of the story it is suggested that the whole episode with the Nordic gods within the castle is a dream of the American commando — his name was Brooklyn, and he 'sounded and acted a lot like Kirby' (Evanier 2008: 62) — but that does not alter the blunt message of the story as spelled out by Odin: 'Valhalla is the Norse heaven [...] not German!' (Kirby and Simon 1944). In this respect 'The Shadow of Valhalla' contradicts the strand of 'The Villain from Valhalla' and can at the same time be seen as anticipating Thor's future recruitment in Marvel's league of superheroes.

[1] Sims refers here to the cover of the first issue of *Captain America Comics* from 1941 (cf. also Moser 2009).

Kirby's third comic about Thor, 'The Magic Hammer', published in *Tales of the Unexpected #16* in 1957, can be read as a simple fable in which greed is condemned. It is the story of a Native American who accompanies a Caucasian gold digger, Gerald Bard, into the Wild West and finds a hammer lying out in the open. The two men discover that if the hammer is struck, it produces thunder and lightning. Consequently, Bard strikes a deal with the authorities of the region whereby he will produce rain on demand. He is successful in selling this service, but when he discovers that the hammer also has the power to split trees in half, he decides to change professions: 'Why, with that magic hammer, I can blast my way through bank walls', he thinks to himself, much like Fenton in the earlier story (Kirby 1957). But before Bard gets a chance to act on this idea, a bearded Viking appears at his side, introduces himself as Thor and says he wants his weapon back:

> I come from a land you know not — and there I rule as master of thunder and lightning [...] Centuries ago, while at the great banquet hall, mischievous little Loki stole my hammer [...] Racing over the clouds, I pursued Loki — but he hurled the hammer into the hills below [...]. As punishment for letting Loki do this, I was reduced to the size of you mortals — and made to roam the earth in search of my hammer. (Kirby 1957)

The story ends with the gold-digger losing his mind, after Thor has reclaimed his hammer and returned to his godly stature. The god's final words suggest he will return home to seek revenge on the thief: 'Ho, ho, ho, ho hí! Loki! [...] I have my hammer back!'

'The Magic Hammer' draws consciously from the heritage of Nordic mythology. It is clear that Kirby (or others who contributed to the story) was familiar with Þórr's role as the god of thunder and also with the myths that describe Loki's repeated attempts to get the inhabitants of Ásgarðr into trouble. A well-known example is in the narrative of *Snorra Edda* describing how Loki lures the goddess Iðunn out of Ásgarðr and enables Þjazi the giant to abduct her to Jötunheimar (*SnE* 1998: I, 1–2; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 60). Indeed, there are no sources suggesting that Loki stole Mjöllnir in the same way, but, given that *Þrymskviða* begins *in medias res* — Þórr wakes in the morning, does not find his hammer and turns first to Loki who is somewhere nearby — it is conceivable that the trickster is somehow responsible (cf. Jón Karl Helgason 2002: 160–62). A more conclusive connection between *Þrymskviða* and 'The Magic Hammer' is that Thor's joyful reaction when he gets the hammer in the comic story echoes the poem's description of Þórr in the same situation (*Hló Hlórriða | hugr í briósti* [...]).

In these three early stories that can partially be attributed to Kirby, there are certainly various elements that reappear in 'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!' but at least two stages are missing in the progress from evil Fenton/Thor to superhero Blake/Thor. In this context, it is worth returning to a comic series appearing in the first editions of *Weird Comics* in 1940. These were published by Fox Feature Syndicate, a company founded by Victor S. Fox and Bob Farrell a year earlier. The stories, called 'Thor, God of Thunder', were attributed to one Wright Lincoln (possibly a pen name used by several writers), but the drawings have been ascribed to Pierce Rice (1916–2003), a young artist who was to work with Stan Lee in the 1950s (cf. Spurgeon 2003). In the first story the reader meets 'the ancient god, Thor, son of Odin, supreme ruler of Valhalla' who looks down on Earth from Asgard and surmises that mankind has use for his powers (Lincoln 1940a). Emphasis is placed on the god's hammer and how he can wield it to cause thunderstorms and discharge lightning. For some reason Thor decides to give a timid American, Grant Farrel, the ability to transform himself into a thunder god when needed. On those occasions, Farrel ducks out and then reappears shortly afterwards in the guise of Thor. His suit is replaced by a costume of sash, boots, cape and winged helmet that enables him to fly but makes him more reminiscent of Peter Pan or Superman than the Nordic Vikings whom Kirby took as his model (cf. Seigfried 2011). The stories devoted to Thor in *Weird Comics* describe, on the one hand, Farrel's hopeless attempts to attract the attention of the modern girl Glenda and, on the other hand, Thor's successful efforts to save her and the Earth from evil villains, who are usually agents of the Axis powers. In one comic, for example, Farrel is terribly concerned when he hears that Glenda is planning to sail from America to Europe where war is raging. He decides to go along and uses his flying ability and hammer to clear mines from their ship's path. Later, he uses the same method to fight Nazi bombers attacking Paris. After blowing several of them to pieces, he ties up the German air fleet with a large chain and throws it down onto the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin (Lincoln 1940b). Glenda does not realize that Farrel and Thor are the same person and her admiration for Thor makes Farrel jealous. It is a classic paradox of superhero stories that had appeared, for instance, in the relationship between Clark Kent/Superman and Lois Lane, and would reappear in the relationship of Donald Blake/Thor with the nurse Jane Foster (originally named Jane Nelson).

Another comic which Stan Lee and his colleagues were evidently familiar with is 'The Hammer of Thor' published in *Out of This World #11* in 1959. The author was Steve Ditko (1927–), who had started his career as an apprentice to Kirby and Simon in the 1950s and later worked with Lee at Marvel on the

first Spider-Man comics (cf. Bell 2008). The story takes place in Scandinavia during the Middle Ages and serves to explain the origins of the myths about the thunder god. Thor is a delicate boy with little interest in the Viking games of his peers, who bully him. His parents disagree about how to handle the situation. The father wants to toughen the boy up, the mother prefers a different tactic. When Thor subsequently flees into the forest, he finds a strangely lit underground cave and, inside, an amulet shaped like a hammer. The brightness fills the boy with powers he has never felt before; he becomes muscular and discovers, by accident, much like the gold-digger in 'The Magic Hammer', that the tool can be used to split trees. 'Though I may never have to fight anyone, this will make a great weapon,' says the boy to himself (Ditko 1959). Later, after Thor's parents have died an untimely death, a group of Huns go rampaging around Scandinavia, and the hammer comes in handy. Thor uses the weapon first against two slant-eyed warriors with the result that they disappear off the face of the earth. In the next frame Thor is seen from behind, having employed the power of the hammer, but instead of the enemy army he is encircled by a red glow and two yellow bolts of lightning. The caption reads as follows: 'The Huns were driven back, discouraged by the strange terrible weapon, and peace came to Scandinavia again but Thor stayed in his happy forest' (Ditko 1959).

Here, several comparisons can be made with 'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!' In both stories, a fragile man finds the thunder god's hammer in an underground cave and uses it to fight off an army of vicious enemies. It is possible that the Asian-looking Huns in Ditko's story were a reference to the Korean War, in which Americans became involved in the early 1950s, but the description of 'the strange terrible weapon' rather suggests that it is a sub rosa glorification of the effect of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 in bringing World War II to an end and maintaining the armed peace of the Cold War years.

It seems credible that most or even all of the five comic book stories from the 1940s and 1950s that we have been discussing were among the sources that inspired Lee, Kirby and Lieber when they created the earliest story devoted to the Mighty Thor. It is more problematic to demonstrate the relationship of these works to the Nordic primary sources. As in the frame of *Thors brudefærd* that features Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem, there are numerous diverse textual references in 'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!' that simultaneously point in widely different directions. The stone men from Saturn that Blake/Thor encounters are an illuminating example. For readers familiar with Icelandic medieval sources, there seems little doubt that these characters are related to the 'stone giants' (Icelandic *bergrisar*) described in *Snorra Edda*.

But for those readers who know Jack Kirby's body of work, it is evident that these are based on the extra-terrestrials that he drew in four comic stories in the period 1959 to 1961, based on the 'moai' stone sculptures of Easter Island in the south-eastern Pacific Ocean. In some of these stories the leader of these rock giants is named Thorr, but Richard Kolkman has suggested that the explanation is not that Kirby had been reading *Snorra Edda* but rather a newly published book by the Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl, *Aku-Aku: The Secret of Easter Island* (1958): 'Is it reasonable to believe that not only was Jack inspired by this book, but that he also later paid homage to its author named "Thor" by combining such diverse concepts as the Easter Island statues with the Norse god of thunder?' Kolkman (2004: 88) asks in that context.

In the wartime stories about Thor that we have explored, the villains were variously linked to the Axis powers and similarly it seems logical to link the alien invasion in 'Thor the Mighty and the Stone Men from Saturn!' with the impending military threat from Moscow. In the 1960s, only two NATO-members in Europe shared a border with the Soviet Union: Norway and Turkey. With reference to Ditko's 'The Hammer of Thor' from 1959, it is even tempting to interpret Thor's hammer in the earliest Marvel story as a symbol of the 'nuclear peace' or the 'balance of terror' that characterized relations between the US and USSR during the Cold War period. Such political references became an important part of Thor's calling at Marvel. In the following issues of *Journey into Mystery* Thor was to struggle both with communists who were ruling over a small country in South America, and one of his future arch-enemies, Zarrko, The Tomorrow Man, who was planning to take over the world. As Martin Arnold (2011: 158) points out, the whole series about the Mighty Thor became a mouthpiece of American ideology and conservatism as it developed from one decade to another:

> In due course, Thor would go on to be depicted as the one-time enemy of Hitler and the subsequent bane of all far-right organizations, a bulwark against the Soviet Union and as a combatant in Vietnam (against another superbeing). Thor also shares Middle America's social anxieties and is, in the late 1960s, for example, a critic of slothful hippies.

Another of Thor's arch-enemies introduced in *Journey into Mystery* in 1962 was the trickster Loki. He plays the main role in the comic 'Trapped by Loki, the God of Mischief'. The first part takes place in Asgard where Odin has imprisoned Loki inside a tree, cursing him never to escape unless someone sheds a tear for him. Using the power of his mind, Loki manages to make a leaf fall from the tree and injure Heimdal's eye, causing him to shed a tear. Thus Loki is

freed and heads for Earth where he intends to obtain Thor's hammer. He uses deception to succeed, causing Thor to change back into Dr. Blake for a while, but before the day is over the thunder god turns the tables on Loki (Lee, Kirby and Lieber 1962b). In the first part of this story, a faint echo can be heard of *Snorra Edda*'s account of the gods' attempt to free Baldr from the underworld. Hel, who presides over the underworld, promises to allow Baldr to return to Ásgarðr *ef allir hlutir í heiminum, kykvir ok dauðir, gráta hann* ('if all things in the world, alive and dead, weep for him') (*SnE* 2005: 47; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 50). Everything appears to go to plan when Loki, disguised as the giantess Þökk, says (s)he cries dry tears for Baldr. Furthermore, Thor's and Loki's fight over control of Mjöllnir in the latter part of 'Trapped by Loki, the God of Mischief' can possibly be linked to Þórr's and Þrymr's fight over the hammer in *Þrymskviða*. Still, it makes more sense to see the comic here as a reworking of Kirby's 'The Magic Hammer' from 1957 in which Loki unquestionably steals the thunder instrument.

In the half-century or so that has passed since the publication of these early stories, Marvel has published hundreds of comics about Thor and his adventures. Over a dozen narratives were adapted for television in the cartoon series *The Marvel Super Heroes*, produced by Marvel and Grantray-Lawrence Animation in 1966. The most recent adaptations of this kind are the action movies *Thor* (2011) directed by Kenneth Branagh (1960–), *Thor: The Dark World* (2013) directed by Alan Taylor (1959–) and *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) directed by Taika Waititi (1975–). These films have also inspired video games and loads of merchandise, ranging from T-shirts, hoodies, jewellery, cufflinks, key chains, patches, alarm clocks, salt and pepper shakers, glasses, magnets and business card holders to wallets, wristbands and dog tags. Thor's role in the comic series *The Avengers* has also contributed to his international fame. Off-shoots of this material have also made their way to television, computers and cinema, including the films *The Avengers* (2012) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) directed by Joss Whedon (1964–). Most of these adaptations are variations on the fundamental themes that emerged in the earliest stories of the Mighty Thor and their American prototypes: The superhero needs to save the planet and Asgard from evil forces, including giants, aliens and mad scientists. In several cases, however, the artists have been seeking inspiration more directly from medieval sources and even some of their reincarnations, including Wagner's operas (cf. Arnold 2011: 158). But the fact is that an independent mythological sphere has developed around these Marvel characters, a world which has become at least as multifaceted as the one we read about in the Eddas (cf. Schmitt 2011). In the medieval sources, for example, it is never quite clear

why Loki lives among the Æsir and Vanir in Ásgarðr, but according to Marvel's mythology, Odin adopted Loki from an early age after killing his father, the giant Laufey (who, according to the Eddas, is Loki's mother!). Furthermore, the stories produced by Marvel have had the most wide-ranging influence on other artists. One interesting example, which rejuvenates Kirby and Simon's interpretation of Thor in 'The Villain from Valhalla', is David Brin's (1950–) *Thor Meets Captain America* from 1986. This novella of alternative history, which two decades later inspired Brin and Scott Hampton's (1959–) acclaimed graphic novel *The Life Eaters*, describes how the Nordic god of thunder teams up with German Nazis and ensures them victory in World War II.

On the Way to Valhalla

The picture painted of violent Vikings in 'The Villain from Valhalla' in 1942 had already found a place in British and American popular culture and would become even more entrenched in the post-war years (cf. Service 1998). In some cases, the ferocity of the Vikings was linked to their pagan beliefs. In this section we will consider two influential American movies made 30 years apart: *The Viking* from 1928, which highlights belief in Thor, and *The Vikings* from 1958, which highlights belief in Odin and eternal life in Valhalla for all men killed in battle. Then we will trace how similar ideas have been thrown about in rock music by bands such as Led Zeppelin from England, Manowar from the United States, Bathory from Sweden, Einherjer from Norway, Týr from the Faroe Islands, Skálmöld from Iceland and Mighty Thor from Mexico.

Produced by Herbert T. Kalmus and directed by Roy William Neill (1887–1946), *The Viking* was one of the last silent movies released by Hollywood but also one of the first Technicolor movies, and synchronized both with music and sound effects (Kalmus 1938). The script, written by Jack Cunningham (1882–1941) and Randolph Bartlett (1881–1943), was based on Ottilie Liljencrantz's (1876–1910) *The Thrall of Leif the Lucky: A Story of Viking Days*, a novel from 1902 which, according to Andrew Wawn's (2000: 325) judgement, 'is a mildly celebratory amplification of popular conjectures about the northmen in Vínland'. Loosely based on the character of Leifr Eiríksson, as presented in Icelandic medieval sources, the film establishes Leif the Lucky as a courtier in Norway who is sent by the Christian king Olaf on a voyage by sea to explore the land west across the Atlantic. On the way, Leif (Donald Crisp) visits his father, Eric the Red (Anders Randolf), who has settled land in Greenland. It comes as a blow to Eric to discover that his son has converted to Christianity, given he is himself a representative of the 'hard, stub-

born paganism' of the Nordic Vikings (Neill 1928). This point is underlined in a scene in the film, set in Greenland, in which two of Eric's men fight over an unsettled debt. The master of the house orders them to make peace and then goes to a large statue of Thor that holds a place of honour in the hall. The statue is like a prototype of the 'blitzkrieging' Thor who later invades New York in 'The Villain from Valhalla': the god of thunder has a grey beard, wears a horned helmet on his head, is bare-chested and has a hammer in his left hand and two lightning-bolts in his right. Eric makes an offering to the god, by lifting a drinking horn and pouring some of the venerable drink onto his wrist. But the men keep fighting, and so Eric has no other choice but to punish them: 'Go — bow to the great god of Thor and give thanks that I have not slain you for drawing knives before the Seat of Justice,' he says (Neill 1928). It is the last straw when he later discovers that one of the men wears a Christian cross around his neck, so he kills the man with his axe. The scene is supposed to shed light on Eric's character — his devotion to the pagan god and his deep-seated hatred of Christianity — and anticipates at the same time the showdown between Eric and Leif later in the film. While the novel ends with Leif and his lot returning home after establishing a temporary Christian colony in Vinland, some of Leif's English and Norwegian travel companions stay behind at the end of the film. Hence, Arne Lunde (2011: 16) has sensibly suggested that *The Viking* 'appropriates the Norse Vinland sagas in order to construct a pre-Columbian, Anglo-Nordic narrative of mythologized American national origins'.

The other film, co-produced by Jerry Bresler and Kirk Douglas and directed by Richard Fleischer (1916–2006), was Calder Willingham's (1922–95) and Dale Wasserman's (1914–2008) adaptation of the 1951 novel *The Viking* by Edison Marshall (1894–1967), which in turn was loosely based on material from *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar* ('The Saga of Ragnar Hairy Breeches'). It is one of a series of classy historical films that came out of Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s; other movies in a similar vein include *Alexander the Great* (1956), *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960). The action of *The Vikings* takes place at the Viking settlement of Ragnar (Ernest Borgnine) and his son Einar (Kirk Douglas) in Norway and in the court of King Aella (Frank Thring) in Northumbria in Britain. The storyline follows Einar's contest with the slave Erik (Tony Curtis), who turns out to be his half-brother, as they compete for the love of Princess Morgana (Janet Leigh), who is promised to King Aella. At the same time, the audience is presented with snapshots of Viking ways; their barbaric games, brutish table manners, excessive drinking and their unrefined relationship with the gods. According to the film, pagan religious customs amount to shouting at the top of one's voice: 'Odin! Odin!' This is reinforced

by the way Ragnar handles his drinking horn at a feast and the way Erik saves his life when Ragnar has had him tied down in a tidal pool to await certain drowning. Higher powers react by letting the wind blow in such a way to keep the tide sufficiently low. *The Vikings* also makes a great deal of the fact that the 'greatest wish of every Viking was to die sword in hand, and enter Valhalla where a hero's welcome awaited them from the god Odin', as spelled out (by Orson Wells) in the opening voice-over (Fleischer 1958). In one scene, when King Aella has ordered his men to throw Ragnar into a wolf pit, Erik passes his sword to the condemned man. Ragnar's fear vanishes straight away, he smiles triumphantly at his enemies and leaps towards the wolves with the name of Odin on his lips. There is a parallel episode at the end of the film after Erik has mortally wounded his half-brother. When Einar reaches futilely for the sword, which he has dropped in the heat of battle, Erik picks up the weapon and nobly hands it to Einar, who smiles, raises the sword, looks towards the heavens, roars 'Odin', and then dies. Even as there seems to have been a slight misunderstanding here of the notion that *hans óskasynir eru allir þeir er í val falla* ('all those who fall in battle are his adopted sons'), as stated with reference to Óðinn in *Snorra Edda*, the film is fairly truthful to the ensuing sentence in the medieval text: *Þeim skipar hann Valhǫll og Vingólf, ok heita þeir þá einherjar* ('He assigns them places in Val-hall and Vingolf, and they are known as Einheriar') (*SnE* 2005: 21; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 21).

The Viking images represented by these two movies seem to have amalgamated in 'Immigrant Song' by Jim Page and Robert Plant of the leading English rock band Led Zeppelin. The libretto begins with a legendary war cry from vocalist Plant, who then describes how he and his companions are rowing with their oars from a land which is characterized by midnight sun, snow, ice and hot springs. Their destination is the shores or 'new lands' in the west, and their purpose is to fight in a battle with 'the horde' (Page and Plant 1970). References in the lyrics to Valhalla and Thor's hammer suggest this is a mantra chanted by a group of Vikings sailing their ship to battle. But in other respects, the lyrics are ambiguous, as evident on Internet blog-sites where Zeppelin fans debate both the origin and destination of these warriors. Some suggest that the Vikings must be leaving northern Norway and heading to the western coast of the British Isles, while others claim that the allusion to the hot springs points towards Iceland. The latter interpretation has been partially confirmed by Plant with reference to the band's summer tour to Reykjavík, Bath and Berlin in 1970: 'We did come from the land of the ice and snow. We were guests of the Icelandic Government on a cultural mission. [...] "Immigrant Song" was about that trip' (Welch 1994: 55). Accordingly, the 'western shore' can possibly refer

to the band's subsequent destinations in England (the song was first performed at the Bath concert) or Germany, but some have been more inclined to associate it with the Viking discovery of America. But neither of these competing readings seems particularly well suited to explaining the second half of the lyrics in which the ferocious initial battle cry is juxtaposed with eccentric tropes of hope and harmony. Peace is supposed to replace the war between the invaders and the locals in the west. The addressees of the lyrics are encouraged to give in to their new 'overlords' and reconstruct all their ruins (Page and Plant 1970). The final lines of the lyrics might allude to the eternal life of the Einherjar in Valhöll, as described in *Snorra Edda*: *Hvern dag þá er þeir hafa klæzk þá hervæða þeir sik ok ganga út í garðinn og berjask ok fellr hverr á annan. Þat er leikr þeira. Ok er líðr at dǫgurðarmáli þá ríða þeir heim til Valhallar ok setjask til drykkju* ('Each day after they have got dressed they put on war-gear and go out into the courtyard and fight each other and they fall each upon the other. This is their sport. And when dinner-time approaches, they ride back to Val-hall and sit down to drink') (*SnE* 2005: 34; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 34).

'Immigrant Song', and some later Led Zeppelin tunes (in particular 'No Quarter' from their 1973 *House of the Holy*), are commonly seen as prototypes for the development of the genre of Viking metal. In 2012, the band's influence on the scene was wittily identified by actor Jack Black at the annual Kennedy Center Honors when he said that Led Zeppelin 'was the greatest rock 'n' roll band of all times', and added that they sang 'songs about love, about Vikings, about Vikings making love' (Swanson 2012). But Black should have added: 'songs about Vikings killing and about Vikings wanting to be killed'. The lyrics of tunes belonging to the genre of Viking metal often describe the thoughts of some anonymous Viking who invokes Thor or his hammer before battle and expresses his desire for eternal life with Odin in Valhalla. Musically and ideologically, the genre is furthermore associated with several other schools of metal rock, in particular death metal and black metal, as developed by bands such as Venom from England, Bathory from Sweden and Mayhem from Norway in the 1980s and '90s. Within all these genres, there is an emphasis on distorted guitar sounds and tremolo picking, aggressive drumming and prominent rhythm changes in the tracks, along with death grunts and growled vocals. In their lyrics, costumes and performances, death and black metal bands often flirt with mysticism, Satanism and atheist attitudes (cf. Moynihan and Søderlind 2007). Within Viking metal this ideology is replaced by the principles of pagan beliefs, in variously intricate and sophisticated ways (cf. Heesch 2011). Simon Trafford and Aleks Pluskowski (2007: 63) link these three movements in the following way:

> Extreme and obsessive loathing of Christianity had long been a norm — a cliché, even — of death and black metallers, but Bathory and, in the 1990s, many other bands and fans began to turn away from Satan and place their faith in the Vikings, and more specifically in Oðin, as the foremost champions of opposition to Christianity. Many claim affiliation to Ásatrú, a religion founded in Texas in the late '60s and attempting to revive Norse heathenism. Whereas many proponents of Ásatrú are hippyish and peaceable New Agers, the slant put on the religion by most of the black metallers who claim devotion to the Aesir is militant and normally fiercely patriotic or racist: Christianity is regularly dismissed as a 'foreign, slave religion', whereas northern Europeans should actually be true to their old gods.

Members of some of these bands went so far as to support and participate in church burnings — an endemic problem in Norway in the 1990s — but in other cases the adaptation of the pagan heritage has been a more frivolous affair, and even intertwined with a genuine interest in folk music and medieval literature.

The extent to which lyrics by numerous Viking metal bands are clichéd echoes of Page and Plant's lyrics is quite remarkable. The lines to 'Gates of Valhalla' on the album *Into Glory Ride* (1983) by the American band Manowar are written from the perspective of a Viking about to die from his battle wounds but seem happy to acknowledge that the gods are waiting for him in Valhalla and implore Odin's hall to open its gates and 'embrace' him (DeMaio 1982). The song 'Valhalla' from the album *Hammerheart* (1990) by the Swedish band Bathory is a parallel example. In the opening lines Thor, the god of thunder, is addressed and implored to swing his hammer but the lyrics end with a description of the dead warriors who are waiting with golden shields for the speaker of the verse and his colleagues to join them in Valhalla (Quorthon 1990). A third example is found in the music of the Mexican band Mighty Thor. In the title song of their *Rumbo al Valhalla*, the refrain goes: *Y en manos de mi seðor estoy / rumbo al Valhalla voy* ('I am in the hands of my master, now I am going to Valhalla') (Mighty Thor 2011).

Certainly, there are several variations on the theme. An elaborate perspective is found in the lyrics of 'Odin Owns Ye All' by the Norwegian band Einherjer on their 1998 album of the same name. A Viking sits by a fire facing four empty chairs and drinks to the memory of friends who have died in battle. He is certain that a Valkyrie has found them on the battle-field and is wishing them all the 'best on their way' to Odin's abode (Glesnes and Storesund 1998). The words to the song 'Hail To The Hammer' from the 2002 album *How Far to Asgaard*, by the Faroese band Týr are in a similar vein. They describe the life of an unspecified Viking at home during winter when the winds blow and dark-

ness prevails. Men pass the time by telling stories of those who have already fallen. The text evokes Þórr and the forces of nature that he represents:

> Hail to the hammer, Hail to the hammer
> To the god of thunder
> The god that's protecting us all
> All hail to the giant hunter
> And hail to the forces of nature all. (Joensen and Holm, 2002)

Trafford and Pluskowski (2007: 63–65) trace the development of Viking metal from bands such as Manowar and Bathory in the 1970s and 1980s, where occasional references to the pagan past were largely embellishments, to Scandinavian bands of recent decades for whom the pagan beliefs of Viking times have become a central theme and shape not only the composition of lyrics but also album cover designs, stage performances and the bands' multifarious promotional material. They refer in that context to Moonsorrow from Finland, Thyrfing from Sweden and Enslaved from Norway, and also make particular reference to the cover of Einherjer's *Odin Owns Ye All*,

> which includes a representation of the one-eyed god and his two ravens, flanked by ornamentation reminiscent of the spiralling tendrils and animals found on Urnes stave church [...]. You could be forgiven for assuming these were album covers from a Scandinavian folk band, but images of the band members themselves — sullen and aggressive, wearing black leather and chain mail — leave no doubt and exemplify the dual character of Viking Metal: the diabolical and masculine heritage of earlier Metal combined with a conscious link to a glorious pre-Christian ancestral past. (Trafford and Pluskowski 2007: 65–67)

This Janus appearance is the trademark of other Viking metal bands all around the globe, including the Mighty Thor.

The cover of *Rumbo al Valhalla* shows a Thor-like Viking with a winged helmet who fights his way through a blizzard towards a towering castle — perhaps Valhalla? On their posters, the band members are typically dressed in black T-shirts and black leather trousers, and hold imposing swords.

The most fanatical bands in the Viking metal tradition have been linked to neopagan cults[2] and in some cases with National Socialist black metal (cf. Dornbusch and Killguss 2007; O'Donoghue 2008: 196–97; Heesch 2011). Other bands have rejected neo-Nazism and racism and associate the pagan elements of their music with different political interests. In this context, the Faroese band Týr is an interesting example. The title of their song 'The Lay of

[2] On Norse Neopaganism, see Chapter 9.2 below.

Figure 7.1.2: Thor on the cover of *Rumbo al Valhalla*, by Mighty Thor. San Bartolo Ameyalco: Allory Records, 2011. Reproduced with permission from the manager, Mighty Thor band.

Thrym' on the 2011 album of the same name is a reference to the English title of *Þrymskviða*. In the lyrics, Þrymr's capture of Þórr's hammer is interpreted in a rather unusual way as a dictator's attempt to suppress those who desire freedom: 'Hammertheft and all the world bereft | Of reason and of right overnight | Left between a tyrant's temper mean | And treason and betrayal, cold and stale' (Joensen and Thomsen 2011). Yet, in its conclusion, the song predicts that Thrym and other tyrants of the world will be toppled from power:

> You stand only for your own
> Any man may throw you off the throne
> Seat will not be set for thee

At the league of free nations
May this mark the end of your reign
Let the lay of Thrym be heard
Leave no tyrant out there undeterred
Thunderstruck theocracy
This theodicy heathen
In the end the giant was slain
Hammer home to any despot's dome
That tales of tyranny end with me. (Joensen and Thomsen 2011)

The song 'Take Your Tyrant' in the same album takes a similar stance: 'Everybody take your tyrant | Make him pay for all his stay | Revolution take your tyrant | Bid him bleed for all his greed' (Joensen 2011). In an interview, band singer Heri Joensen (b. 1973) acknowledged that he was a supporter of Faroese independence from Denmark but denied that 'Take Your Tyrant' and other songs with comparable lyrics by him on the album referred to the Faroese independence movement: 'That was mostly inspired by events in the Arab Spring. I was not really thinking about actual independence with us' (Seigfried 2013).

Some of the more original and inventive Viking metal bands have followed Marvel's example and created their own narratives to fit within the pagan mythological frame of reference. The album *Börn Loka* ('Loki's Children', 2012) by the Icelandic band Skálmöld contains a series of linked lyrics about the hero Hilmar Baldursson, whom Óðinn calls upon in the opening song to obliterate Loki's children. The following tracks describe how Óðinn lends Hilmar his eight-footed horse Sleipnir and how Hilmar battles with Fenrir, the World Serpent, and Hel. Most of these lyrics refer cleverly to the narrative of the Eddas. The lines of the song 'Gleipnir', for example, are based on the description in *Snorra Edda* of how Fenrir was tied up with the chains Drómi, Læðingr and Gleipnir. According to the ancient texts, Gleipnir was made from *dyn kattarins ok af skeggi konunnar ok af rótum bjargsins ok af sinum bjarnarins ok af anda fisksins ok af fogls hráka* ('the sound of the cat's footfall and the woman's beard, the mountain's roots and the bear's sinews and the fish's breath and bird's spittle') (*SnE* 2005: 28; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 28). All of these elements are mentioned in the lyrics but in the final verses Hilmar claims that he is now holding Gleipnir and watching *á móti glyrnum tveim.* | *Treysti á Óðin, Týr og Sleipni,* | *tak mig þar og aftur heim* ('into the two eyeballs. I trust Óðinn, Týr and Sleipnir will take me there and back home') (Snæbjörn Ragnarsson 2012). Other bands have gone so far as to take lines directly from specific eddic poems, either in translation or in the original Icelandic. The words to the songs 'Out of Ginnungagap' and 'A New Earth' on Einherjer's *Odin Owns Ye All* are, for

example, partially copied from W. H. Auden and Paul B. Taylor's English translation of the eddic poem *Völuspá* ('The Prophecy of the Seeress')

It is hard to estimate just how much influence Viking metal has had on the public conception of pagan beliefs and Nordic mythology in the past decades. As Heather O'Donoghue (2008: 197) points out, this kind of music 'has a cult following, rather than any appeal to popular culture. Popular appeal would probably be accounted artistic failure'. However, it is interesting how widely Viking metal bands pop up and how unequivocally they connect with the mythological heritage, for instance, in their choice of names. The bands Ásmegin from Norway, Hel and Thrym from Sweden, Sleipnir from Britain, Helrunar from Germany, Baldrs Draumar from the Netherlands, Midgaard from Russia, Hildr Valkyrie from Greece and Horde Thor from Columbia are decisive examples. In the conclusion to their article, Trafford and Pluskowski (2007: 71) seek to explain the growing popularity of this musical genre and point to the influence of fantasy literature and films, among other things. But they also remind us of the classic role of rock music as a symbol of impatient youthful rebellion against all that is conventional and acknowledged: 'Escape into a stirring past, like rock 'n' roll decadence, may be an understandably attractive alternative to the horrors of respectable middle-class life in an affluent, enlightened European democracy.'

The Maiden Thor

In the final chapter of her book on the history of Norse mythology Heather O'Donoghue (2008: 197) discusses the Mighty Thor comics and says: 'The hallmark of all comics aimed at younger readers is violence made entertaining — dramatic but essentially unserious and undisturbing physical encounters between figures exhibiting almost humorously excessive physical strength.' Although this statement applies to the American comics discussed in the first section of this chapter, other comics about the Nordic gods can be found in which the material is treated in a different way. These show that popular adaptations of the Nordic mythological heritage do not necessarily emphasize manliness, violence or the prized fate of Vikings who die in battle.

One early example is a Manga series that the prolific and respected Japanese comic artist Shotaro Ishinomori (1938–98) began working on in 1964 under the title *Saibōgu Zero-Zero-Nain* (*Cyborg 009*). This material was serialized in various Japanese comic magazines, and later in book form, right up until 1981. *Saibōgu Zero-Zero-Nain* focuses on a multinational group of characters, eight men and one woman. They are captured by the evil Black Ghost organization

and changed into half-robots with different superpower abilities. The Black Ghost aims to produce weapons of mass destruction and bring about a devastating world war. The Cyborgs, led by the Japanese-American Joe Shimamura, do not succumb to the control of their captor and manage to foil his plans. They then continue working together in the battle against various villains and monsters, including mythological characters from the past. In some respects, the Cyborg-team can be compared to the Boy Commandos and the Avengers, but as Halldór Stefánsson (1993: 89) has highlighted, their stories are in other respects suited to 'Japanese idiom, sensibilities and tastes'. In 1976, Ishinomori created *Saibōgu Zero-Zero-Nain: Edda*, a three-part story of 160 or so pages that describes the group's visit to Iceland. The nine cyborgs arrive by passenger jet and then journey into the harsh interior of the country. Hidden there is the mythological world of the pagan gods, with the world tree Yggdrasill towering over a settlement of small timber houses. The foreign guests make themselves at home but soon have to deal with ruthless beasts and gigantic creatures that are familiar to anyone who knows Nordic mythology; among them are the wolf Fenrir, Óðinn's horse Sleipnir, the World Serpent and Þórr. The most curious opponent is a vicious incubus that makes several attempts to strangle the female member of the group as she lies asleep in her bed in one of the houses. The scene, which clearly pays homage to Henry Fuseli's painting *The Nightmare*, ends with Joe Shimamura storming into the room and shooting the uninvited guest. Much like in 'The Villain from Valhalla', it turns out that behind the enemy army stands a crazy scientist who has planted an atom bomb within the world tree and who succeeds in blowing it up. There is certainly an echo here of the description of Ragnarök from the Eddas, but it probably makes more sense to connect the end of the story with the critical view of weapons and warfare that has been a recurring theme in public Japanese ideology in the post-war period and is prominent in Ishinomori's *Saibōgu Zero-Zero-Nain* stories.

The most ambitious European attempt to transpose Nordic mythology onto the medium of comic books is the Danish Valhalla series mentioned earlier in this chapter.[3] A total of fifteen volumes came out, most of which were based not only on characters from Nordic mythology but more directly on narratives found in the Eddas and other sources. The first six volumes were issued by the publishing house Interpresse, and the rest by Carlsen Comics. Although the project is usually attributed to comic artist Peter Madsen alone, an impressive group of writers and artists was involved. Henning Kure (b. 1953), editor at

[3] The Valhalla series is also discussed in Chapter 6.3.2 above in the context of Nordic children's literature.

Interpresse, initiated the project and took an active part in developing the concept from the beginning. From the seventh volume on, he was included alongside Hans Rancke-Madsen (b. 1956) and Per Vadmand (b. 1944) as one of the official writers of the *Valhalla* series. The extent to which each story is based on eddic material varies quite a lot from volume to volume, but the focus here will be on the background to the first two volumes.[4]

One of the key sources of inspiration for the first volume, *Ulven er løs* ('Cry Wolf'), which was published in 1979, is *Snorra Edda*'s account of Þórr's journey to Útgarða-Loki. According to the medieval version, Þórr and Loki seek lodging at a farm on the way to Jötunheimar, and it is noted that the farmer had two children, Þjálfi and Röskva. In the evening, Þórr slaughters the two billy-goats that pull his carriage, cooks them and invites the farmer and his family to eat with him and Loki. He also orders them to throw the bones onto the goat skins at the end of the meal. The next morning, Þórr consecrates the remains of the meal with his hammer, bringing the billy-goats back to life, but one of them is limping. It turns out that Þjálfi, not satisfied with gnawing the meat of the thighbone in question, broke it to get at the marrow. This infuriates Þórr, but he calms down when the head of the household offers to compensate him for the loss. It is decided that the children should become *þjónustumenn Þórs ok fylgja þau honum jafnan síðan* ('Thor's bondservants, and they have attended him ever since') (*SnE* 2005: 37; Snorri Sturluson 1995: 38).

The first part of *Ulven er løs* closely follows this part of the narrative from *Snorra Edda*, with a few additions. For example, at the beginning of the comic story it is made clear that Røskva is much more courageous than Tjalfe, even though she is younger. When Thor and Loki first arrive at the farm, the girl is out walking an enormous dog of which her brother is obviously afraid. Another addition is that in the comic book it is Loki who quietly encourages Tjalfe to break the goat's thighbone and suck the marrow from it, explaining that *et enkelt ben spiller ingen rolle — der er jo så mange* ('one bone does not play much of a part — there are so many of them') (Madsen and Rancke-Madsen 1979: 5). This accords well with how Loki is responsible for various misdeeds in other myths, and it is up to him in *Ulven er løs* to calm down the angry Thor. Loki proposes that Tjalfe should enter their service in order to make up for his transgression. Røskva is not a part of the arrangement in the comic version, but she is unhappy about being left behind and so sneaks onto Thor's carriage to be with her brother ever after. Introducing the siblings at the beginning of the story in this way is clever as their main role in the series then is to represent the

[4] For a detailed analysis of the Valhalla series as a whole, cf. Hafner (2008).

perspective of young readers in this unfamiliar setting. Unlike the account in *Snorra Edda*, Thor and Loki do not head for Udgårdsloke's farm following this episode — Madsen and his colleagues did not have that journey take place until the fifth volume of the series. Instead they travel to Asgård where the children (and readers) are introduced to all the main gods and their quarters, especially to the palace Bilskirner where Thor lives with his wife Sif, and Valhalla, where Odin reigns alongside his wife Frigg.

The other important source of inspiration for *Ulven er løs* is the account in *Snorra Edda* of the gods' attempts to tie up the wolf Fenrir. According to the medieval text, the gods fostered the wolf in Ásgarðr and Týr saw to feeding him. As the wolf grew larger, the gods attempted to tie him up using the strong chain Drómi, and then the stronger chain Læðingr, but Fenrir easily broke free both times. It was not until some dwarves — at the request of Skírnir — made the silver chain Gleipnir that the gods finally succeeded in restraining the wolf. In *Ulven er løs* Frigg tells Tjalfe and Røskva a simplified version of this story on their first night in Valhalla. The children have already discovered that there is a crisis in Asgård because the wolf is roaming free. Gleipnir has proven less reliable than the gods had wanted, and Loki is blamed in the comic version, because it is he (not Skírnir) who was sent to the dwarves at the time. Loki is therefore expected to go back to meet them again and have the chain fixed. He borrows a falcon skin from Freja for the journey, an episode taken from *Þrymskviða*.

In the last part of *Ulven er løs* the gods' failed attempts to chain the wolf up again are described, but the story ends with Røskva succeeding. The girl simply loves animals and has her heart in the right place, and for those reasons has greater success than the rash gods. Although individual threads in the story are taken from here and there, *Ulven er løs* is indeed an independent creation and an emblematic adventure story that serves to boost the confidence of young readers, especially girls. In this way, the moral of the Danish version is far removed from the moral of most American Marvel comics about Thor, where might is normally right. Additionally, *Ulven er løs* reflects contemporary concerns, which in Denmark of the late 1970s included significant reforms towards gender equality.

Thors brudefærd, referred to at the start of this chapter, was the second volume in the *Valhalla* series and came out in 1980. Its entire subject matter was drawn from one and the same source, *Þrymskviða*. The storyline of the eddic poem is mostly unchanged in the comic story, but Madsen weaves various elements into the plot and interprets it in a fairly modern way. It is unclear in *Þrymskviða* how Þrymr comes to possess Mjöllnir, but on the first page of the comic this ques-

Figure 7.1.3: Trym in Madsen 1980: 32.
Reproduced courtesy of Peter Madsens Tegnestue.

tion is answered definitively: shadowy giants are shown approaching Bilskirner in the dead of night and taking something from one of the tower rooms while the gods are busy singing and drinking elsewhere in Thor's palace. Other additions include Thor and Loki, disguised as women, staying one night at the hall of Udgårdsloke on their way to Trym's place. A new scene is added to the end of the comic too, illustrating Thor triumphantly returning home with the hammer. Sif, who is pregnant at the start of the narrative, welcomes her husband with twins in her arms, thereby revealing a new side of the thunder god as a proud father.

Scholars' understanding of *Þrymskviða* partially depends on the way in which they interpret the symbolic meaning of Mjöllnir. There is a long tradition of seeing the hammer as a thunder instrument and interpreting the poem as an allegory of natural phenomena. In that case, Þrymr and other giants represent the forces of winter, attempting to delay the coming of spring — the prolific rain — by capturing Mjöllnir or, even better, Freyja, the goddess of fertility (cf. Weinholt 1849). But it is also possible to regard the hammer as a symbol of social power. Freyja's reluctance to accept Þrymr's proposal suggests that the gods of Ásgarðr have little respect for the giants and regard them as socially inferior. She says (Neckel 1983: 113): *Mik veitstu verða / vergiarnasta, / ef ec ec með þér / í iotunheima!* ('You will know me as a nymphomaniac if I drive with you to the world of the giants'). The third alternative is to interpret Mjöllnir as a symbol of masculinity and even literally as Þórr's phallus. In the absence of the hammer he is turned into a woman, or at least into a rather interesting transvestite, as Margaret Clunies Ross (1994: 109) has pointed out: 'on a symbolic level the god has had the emblem of his masculinity removed while in the passive state of sleep. It is as if he had been castrated'.

Peter Madsen does not work with the first interpretive option, except that he draws a clear distinction between the fertile nature of Asgård and the cold and barren environment in the land of the giants. Greater emphasis is placed on the class distinction between the gods and the giants. While Thor lives in a grand palace with many towers, Trym lives underground in a warren of big caverns and dark tunnels. It is indicative of the low cultural status of the giants that all the written instructions in Trym's abode are misspelled; a sign above the door into the kitchen for instance reads *Køggen* ('Kitchin') (Madsen 1980: 32).

While the gods in Asgård look like regular people and are nicely dressed, Trym's court mostly consists of trolls and monsters, many of whom look like characters from *The Muppet Show* or early *Star Wars* films. Trym is the most human-looking of them all, but his small red skullcap, which looks a bit like a Muslim *taqiyah*, may suggest an Islamic background. In this context, it is worth

noting that there was a growing influx of immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia into Denmark in the 1970s. Conversely, Trym has big lips that make him suspiciously similar to one of Denmark's greatest comedians of the period, Dirch Passer.[5]

In *Þrymskviða* Þrymr is not only quite wealthy but also materialistic. When Loki meets him for the first time in the poem, we are told:

Þrymr sat á haugi,	þursa dróttinn,
greyiom sínom	gullbǫnd snøri
ok mǫrom sínom	mǫn iafnaði (Neckel 1983: 111)

(Þrymr sat on a mound, the lord of the monsters, plaiting golden collars for his dogs and was trimming the manes of his horses.)

Later, the giant boasts of his belongings:

Ganga hér at garði	gullhyrnðar kýr,
øxn alsvartir,	iotni at gamni;
fiolð á ec meiðma,	fiolð á ec menia,
einnar mér Freyio	ávant þiccir' (Neckel 1983: 114)

(In the yard we have gold-horned cows, jet-black oxen, for the giant's enjoyment; I have many treasures, I have many necklaces, I find Freyja alone to be lacking.)

Although Madsen does not recycle these stanzas in his comic version (except for having Trym sit literally on a mound), he is receptive to the giant's materialism. During the preparation for the wedding, Loki enters a large cavern where Trym stores all this gold and even swims in it. The scene alludes to Scrooge McDuck's money swim in Walt Disney's Donald Duck universe; later it is revealed that Trym, just like Scrooge, cherishes his very own *alrførste* ('nummber one') dime (Madsen 1980: 32).

Þrymr's claim in *Þrymskviða* that Freyja is the only thing missing in his portfolio clearly suggests that women are considered to be items of property in Jötunheimar. The status of women does not seem to be much better in Ásgarðr, but the eddic poem can nonetheless be read as a radical criticism of a patriarchal medieval society with its fixed gender and social roles (cf. Clunies Ross 1994: 108–11; Jón Karl Helgason 2002: 160–63). These same issues are also at the forefront in *Thors brudefærd*. Right from the first pages of the comic, Thor is characterized as a chauvinistic husband who orders his pregnant wife to prepare breakfast and pretends to be worried when he sees that she is car-

[5] I would like to thank Haukur Ingvarsson for pointing this out to me.

rying heavy loads but never offers to give her a hand. Similar sexism can be detected in Trym's dealings with his sister and in the common view of the giants at Udgårdsloke's farm that the only language women can understand is the language of violence. But these ideas are also undermined in the comic book, such as when some of the gods and goddesses try to convince Freja that she should marry Trym. Freja ferociously retorts by asking Idun: *Såh? — og hvad ville du sige til at blive byttet bort for en dum, gammel hammer, som en anden handelsvare?* ('What should you say to being traded away for a stupid old hammer, like a commodity?') (Madsen 1980: 13). It is not until her father shows up and scolds her that Freja hesitates, but at the same moment Loki has the bright idea of dressing Thor up as a woman so he can reclaim the hammer. In the eddic poem, Þórr's makeover is described in detail:

Bundo þeir Þór þá	brúðar líni
ok ino mikla	meni Brísinga,
léto und hánom	hrynia lucla
ok qvennváðir	um kné falla,
en á briósti	breiða steina,
ok hagliga	um hǫfuð typþo. (Neckel 1983: 113)

(Then they dressed Þórr in a bride's linen and in the Brísing necklace, they also decorated him with keys and let women's garments fall around her knees, but on the breast they put big stones, and arranged a head-dress.)

Peter Madsen obviously had these lines in mind when he drew the scene in question. He left out the keys and added a burka that hides Thor's beard, but what is particularly interesting is the way in which he turns the poem's stones, that most scholars and translators have interpreted as being jewels, into artificial breasts.

In spite of his feminine figure, Thor finds it difficult to play his female role, especially when the chauvinists at Udgårdsloke's farm start to harass him and when he is forced to do the dishes along with the 'other' women in Trym's household. He loses his temper when he discovers that the male supervisor working in the kitchen is on a higher salary than the women who work there: *Hvorfor i alverden skal han have mere end mig — jeg har jo lavet meget mere!!?!* ('Why on earth is he better paid than I am? I did much more!!?!') Thor dramatically asks, but the only reply he gets is that the supervisor is a man, *så hans arbejde er mere værd en dit* ('so his work is worth more than yours') (Madsen 1980: 35). Trym's sister, who has been wary of the bride all along, witnesses this conversation and becomes convinced that her future sister-in-law cannot possibly be a woman. These examples both show how responsive Madsen is to the

Figure 7.1.4: Thor and Loki disguised as women in Madsen 1980: 17.
Reproduced courtesy of Peter Madsens Tegnestue.

gender issues in the original text and to the ways in which they can be used to reflect upon contemporary society. In that context, it is worth recalling that the equal pay act was not passed in Denmark until 1976, merely four years prior to the publication of *Thors brudefærd*.

It is indeed remarkable to witness the most masculine character of the Nordic mythological world — the prototype of Marvel's the Mighty Thor — becoming a victim of sexual harassment, jingoism and the gender pay gap. This leitmotif ripens when Trym turns a deaf ear to his sister's warning about the phony bride and scolds her: *Blander du dig nu igen? Hvad gør du iøvrigt her din dovne sæk!! Skrub ud og find noget fornuftigt at tage dig til* ('Are you interfering

again? What are you doing here, you lazy slag!! Get out of here and find something useful to do') (Madsen 1980: 43). One of the lessons of the comic book is that men should listen to what women have to say. But another lesson is that it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks. When Thor returns to Asgård, he says that he is shocked by the ways in which women are treated by the giants, but at the same time he wryly declines Sif's request for him to give her a hand around the house. As a result, gods and goddesses open a debate about the inequality of the sexes. While Sif reproaches everyone present for trying to let Freja marry the ugly brute Trym and sneers at Tyr when he claims that men should rule and women obey, Thor is busy taking care of his newborn twins. Briefly, hope is raised that the roles of the sexes within the family might be turned around, but as soon as the baby girl starts to urinate, the father hands her over to the mother saying: *Den er våd* ('She's wet') (Madsen 1980: 47).

In comparison to the first volume of the *Valhalla* series, Tjalfe and Røskva do not play big roles in *Thors brudefærd*. Still they accompany Thor and Loki to the wedding, and the girl is once again more of a star than her brother. She shows, for instance, great courage when she sneaks down into the *hæmelit sgatkamer* ('secrit treesure-chamber'), guarded by armed giants and a green dragon (Madsen 1980: 37). There she finds Thor's hammer, but unfortunately she is not strong enough to carry it away with her. The page devoted to this adventure is a good example of how Madsen develops interesting subplots in his adaptation of *Þrymskviða*. Some of these subplots are revealed in the background of individual illustrations, for instance, a comic description of a young giant-boy who sits on the tie beam of Udgårdsloke's hall and fishes for food from the hands of the grown-ups below (Madsen 1980: 22–23). In the hall of Trym, attentive readers will also notice a rowdy giant-boy named Quark who attempts to steal a sausage from a girl in the kitchen (Madsen 1980: 34) and sets fire to the hair of one of the wedding-guests (Madsen 1980: 40). Details of this sort, just like the allusion to *The Muppet Show* mentioned at the opening of this chapter, are designed to make the reading and rereading of the story more pleasurable and encourage readers to study each drawing in detail. Personally, I had read through *Thors brudefærd* several times before realizing that a group of five rather ordinary-looking wedding guests looked suspiciously similar to the five creators of the series: Madsen, Kure, Rancke-Madsen, Vadman and Håkansson (Madsen 1980: 39).

The third volume, *Odins væddemål* ('Odin's Wager'), published in 1982, was, like the first volume, based on several medieval sources. Furthermore, the Valhalla artists started preparing the production of an animated film based on the characters they had been developing, giving the giant-boy Quark a lead-

ing role. An original plot was created around his character, though in the second half of the film the plot from *Snorra Edda*, describing Þórr's trip to Útgarða-Loki, was recycled to some degree. The film premiered in 1986 and also inspired the next two comic books in the series: *Historien om Quark* ('The Story of Quark'), published in 1988, and *Rejsen til Udgårdsloke* ('The Journey to Utgard-Loki') from 1989. The first five volumes were translated into all the Nordic languages, as well as Dutch, German and Indonesian, with three of them also translated into French. Though the remaining ten volumes of the series have not enjoyed as wide circulation, all are available in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. The last volume, published in 2009, was *Vølvens syner* ('The Sibyl's Visions'), inspired by *Völuspá*,

Coda

In this chapter, the focus has been on a few of the twentieth-century comic books, films and heavy metal bands that have been inspired by the Eddas. Emphasis has been placed on works and traditions that have enjoyed considerable circulation in at least several countries. Although they are just a small sample of the immense number of possible examples, they serve to demonstrate the lively afterlife of the eddic tradition within popular culture. In most instances, I have traced some of the threads linking modern adaptations to medieval texts, in particular to *Snorra Edda* and *Þrymskviða*, while also illustrating the remarkable way in which the authors of the modern works seem motivated by a wide range of influences; from the genre in question and other products of popular culture, to their own life and times and earlier adaptations of the same material. In this context, it is worth mentioning the film *Erik the Viking* from 1989, written and directed by Terry Jones (1942–), member of the Monty Python comedy team. Partially based on a children's book written by Jones six years earlier, the film describes a young Viking who is not only fed up with his fellow Vikings' wish to enter Valhalla but is also determined to halt the impending Ragnarök. Several scenes in the film are inspired by *The Vikings* from 1958, but the most original part is the finale in which the gods of Asgard are characterized as perpetual children who could not care less about the fate of us mortals.

Most of the works discussed in this chapter are from the period 1940 to 1990, during which time the moderate profile of Nordic gods in popular culture is relatively easily definable. In the past twenty-five years, however, there has been such growth in this area that compiling an overview would be a much more cumbersome task. Japanese and South-Korean comic books (manga), animated films (anime) and video games that refer in one way or another to

pagan myths or Vikings have, for instance, become a specialized field of study which is to some degree still unmapped (cf. Itsuij and Itó 2007; Itó 2007). Among the works that could be considered in this context are the manga series *Akai Tsurugi* ('The Scarlet Sword') by Ryō Azumi, *Suishō no Dragon* ('Crystal Dragon') by Yuho Ashibe, *Matantei Loki* ('The Mythical Detective Loki') by Sakura Kinoshita, *Vínland Saga* by Makoto Yukimura and *Ragnarok* by Lee Myung-jin. Some of these inspired anime-series and *Ragnarok* also became the basis for the computer game *Ragnarok Online* produced by the South Korean Gravity Corporation. Other interesting works from recent years include the 2004 South African fantasy-action-horror film *The Berserker*, the 2006 Danish television advent calendar *Jul i Valhal* ('Yule in Valhalla'), the 2007 American comic book *Gods of Asgard* by Erik E. Evensen, the computer game *Viking: Battle for Asgard* which the Japanese company Sega released in 2008 and the Icelandic animated film *Hetjur Valhallar: Þór* ('Legends of Valhalla: Thor') from 2011. One recent production in this prolific field is the low-budget Swedish martial arts comedy *Kung Fury*, released in 2015. The hero of this short film is an American detective from Miami who gets assistance from Thor to take on Adolf Hitler (Kung Führer). Sound familiar?

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Waititi, Taika, dir. 2017. *Thor: Ragnarok*. Burbank: Marvel Studios.

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Part 8

The Reception in Modern and Contemporary Art

8.1 – Norse Myths in the Visual Arts of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: A Short Catalogue Raisonné

Sarah Timme*

List of Works

Ásmundur Sveinsson. 1967. *Loki's Advice*. Sculpture in iron and copper referring to the myth of Balder's death. 74 × 90 cm. Listasafn Reykjavíkur.

Beuys, Joseph. 1985. *Where Is My Jewellery? Where Are My Slices, My Bridles?* Installation incorporating a nineteenth-century edition of the Poetic and the Prose Edda respectively. Munich: Museum Brandhorst.

Dan, Lars, Bo Green Jensen and Kim Helweg. *c*. 1992. *Ragnarok Scenario*. Eight oil paintings (203 × 230 cm, 202 × 280 cm respectively) accompanied by eight poems by Jensen and a symphony by Helweg.

Davies, Miles. 1994. *Thor's Footstool*. Large (6 × 9 m approximately) sculpture of stainless steel and granite in front of the offices of the Danish construction company Christiani & Nielsen. Warwick, England.

Engelhardt, Maja Lisa. 2001. *Ask and Embla*. Acrylic on canvas. First painting in a cycle on Danish history at Christiansborg Palace. 230 × 258 cm.

* When this volume was planned, it was intended that Sarah Timme would contribute a whole chapter on the subject of works of visual art influenced by Norse myth in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to complement her chapter (6.2.4) in Volume 1 of this study on art from the German-speaking world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, changes in her personal circumstances have prevented her completing it, so this short catalogue stands in its place as an indication of the subject's scope.

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Figure 8.1.1: Peter Hupfauf, *Gangleri asked* [...]. 1999. Mixed media.
Reproduced with permission from the artist.

Einar Jónsson. 1909. *Ymir and Audhumla*. Sculpture in bronze. Reykjavík: Listasafn Einars Jónssonar.

Gabríela Friðriksdóttir. 2011. *Crepusculum*. Installation incorporating several Icelandic manuscripts.

Gannon, Patrick. 2006. *Loki and the Apples of the Gods*. Four paper cuts accompanying a tale by Christy Lenzi in the children's magazine *Cricket* (November 2006).

Hrdlicka, Alfred. 2001. *Wotan*. Bronze, 15 × 15 × 11 cm. Vienna: Galerie Ernst Hilger.

Huber, Ika. 1999. *Ygdrasil II*. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 195 × 160 cm.

Hupfauf, Peter. 1998–2000. *Gylfaginning*. Series of twenty-nine paintings, mixed media. 120 × 90 and 90 × 120 cm respectively. Sydney, Australia.

Jacobsen, Robert. 1954. *Thor*. Abstract sculpture of painted iron. 38.1 × 30.5 × 22 cm. Aalborg: KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art.

Jorn, Asger. 1960. *Odin and Eurydike*. Oil on canvas. 89 × 116 cm. Private collection.

Kasemir, Manuela. 2008. *Urd*. Series of seven photographic self portraits (digital C-prints). 33 × 46 cm. Private collection.

Kiefer, Anselm. 1982. *The Song of Völund*. Lead and straw on oil on canvas. 280 × 380 cm. London: Saatchi Gallery.

Kiefer, Anselm. 1998–99. *Naglfar (The Argonauts)*. Sculpture of animal material, tooth, lead, mixed media. Gent: S.M.A.K.

Kienholz, Edward, and Nancy Kienholz. 1976. *The Norns*. Installation incorporating a so-called 'Volksempfänger' (a radio set common in Germany during National Socialism) playing a score from Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*. 156 × 294 × 156 cm. Milan: Fondazione Prada.

Kirkeby, Per. 1962. *Frau Ragnarok*. Etching. 30.3 × 26.8 cm. Silkeborg: Museum Jorn.

Klee, Paul. 1926. *She Sinks to the Grave!* Pen and watercolour referring to *Völuspá* or *Baldrs draumar*. 48.5 × 34.5 cm. Bern: Kunstmuseum.

Kline, Franz. 1950. *Wotan*. Oil on canvas on masonite. 139.7 × 201.5 cm. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts.

Leifur Breiðfjörð. 2007. *Völuspá* and *Vision of the Sibyl*. Glass paintings. 13 × 8 m and 6 × 6 m respectively. Reykjavík: Grand Hotel.

Lindström, Bengt. 1983. *The Seven Æsir*. Seven oil paintings showing Balder, Freyr, Loki, Odin, Thor, Ymir and an unknown god. 200 × 350 cm. Härnösand Murberget.

Mortensen, Richard. 1965. *Völuspá*. Thirteen abstract silkscreen prints. 70 × 50 cm each.

Mortensen, Richard. 1984–85. *The History of the Cow*. Cycle of ten oil paintings referring to a zen Buddhist myth but addressing Norse mythology in three of the paintings. Kolding: Kunstmuseum Trapholt.

Nørgaard, Bjørn. 1983–86. *Thor's Tower*. The tower with a height of 26.5 m made of ferro-concrete, bricks and other metallic material marks an old cult site in Taastrup, Denmark.

Nørgaard, Bjørn. 1991–97. *The Viking Age*. Wool and silk. One of the tapestries manufactured for Queen Margarethe of Denmark's fiftieth birthday. 395 × 642 cm. Copenhagen: Christiansborg Palace.

Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir. 1991–92. *Völuspá*. Etchings. Reykjavík Art Museum.

Rex, Jytte. 2004–05. *Fosser Falder* ('Waterfalls Plunge'). Installation of seven concrete reliefs, one with quotations from *Völuspá*, and six panels in various media. Copenhagen: Library of the Arnamagnæan Institute

Rylander, Hans Christian. 1990–2004. Lead and bronze. Installation on Danish history at Provianthuset, part of the Arsenal Dock in Copenhagen, incorporating Odin's ravens Huginn and Muninn and Thor's hammer.

Salomé. 1987. *The Three Norns or the Creation of the World*. Acrylic on canvas. 254 × 325 cm.

Söderberg, Fredrik. 2005. *Ragnarök*. Oil painting on plexiglass. 50 × 40 cm. Exhibited at the exhibition 'Ragnarök' at Milliken Gallery, Stockholm.

Tàpies, Antoni. 1950. *Wotan's Sleight of Hand*. Oil on canvas. 89 × 116 cm. Barcelona. Private collection.

Weisberg, Derek. 2014. *Huginn and Muninn*. Cone 10 stoneware. 76 × 48 × 25.5 cm. Destroyed (parts have been incorporated into other works).

Werenskiold, Dagfin. 1940–50. *Yggdrasil frieze*. 230 × 220 cm. Sixteen wooden reliefs decorating the courtyard of Oslo City Hall.

Book Illustrations and Artists' Books

Bremer, Uwe (illustrations), and H. C. Artmann (text). 1976. *Heimholung des Hammers*. Vienna: Edition Ernst Hilger. Eight colour etchings referring to an adaptation of *Þrymskviða*.

Bringsværd, Tor Åge. 1985–95. *Vår gamle gudelære*. Oslo: Gyldendal. Series of thirteen children's books, each illustrated by a different artist.[1]

Brøgger, Suzanne. *Vølvens spådom: Völuspá*. This adaptation has been published in several illustrated editions: in 1994 with lithographs by Per Kirkeby (Copenhagen: Brøndum) and with illustrations by Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir (Reykjavík: Mál og menning); in 2002 with photographs by Pia Schutzmann (Copenhagen: Athene); and in 2015 with drawings by Martin Bigum (Copenhagen: Gyldendal).

Grønbech, Vilhelm, and Ernst Hansen (illustrations). 1941. *Nordiske Myter og Sagn*. Copenhagen: Povl Branner.

Gulbrandsen, Niclas. 1990. *Håvamål*. Paris: Edouard Weiss. Contains Ivar Mortensson-Egnunds's new Norwegian translation of *Hávamál* and seventeen woodcuts by Niclas Gulbrandsen.

Ketelhodt, Ines von. 2003. *Zweite Enzyklopädie von Tlön. Yggdrasil*. Flörsheim am Main: n. pub. Artist's book comprising photographs of trees.

Kiefer, Anselm. 2008. *Das Balder-Lied*. Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, Edition Heiner Bastian.

King, Peter. 1950s. *The Ash of Mimir*. Ink and monotype. Incomplete book project. 20.2 × 29.25 cm. London: Peter King Archive.

Lindgren, Torgny, and Peter Dahl. 1988. *Kärleksguden Frö: En levnadsteckning*. Stockholm: Norstedts. 216 copies were published as a luxury edition with four original lithographs by Peter Dahl.

Oehlenschläger, Adam, and Aksel Jørgensen (woodcuts). 1928. *Nordens Guder: Et episk Digt* Copenhagen: Chr. Christensen.

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Schrader, Henrik. 1989. *Der Seherin Gesicht*. Dresden: o-rakel. Artists' book in silkscreen illustrating Felix Genzmer's translation of *Völuspá*.

[1] Bringsværd's work is discussed in Chapter 6.3.2 above on children's literature.

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Part 9

The Role of the Pre-Christian Religions of the North in Modern National, Political and Religious Movements

9.1 – Old Norse Mythology and Heroic Legend in Politics, Ideology and Propaganda

Julia Zernack
Translated from the German by Matthias Ammon

Gods from times immemorial have been invoked in many contexts in order to give an appearance of timeless validity to contemporary demands. Presumably most mythologies have provided a source for allegories and symbols which have been employed to make political ideologies heard. It is a commonly held assumption that Old Norse mythology and heroic legend are particularly susceptible to being used in this fashion, primarily by right-wing schools of thought like German National Socialism. However, the political utilization of this material is an international phenomenon which is limited neither to right-wing ideologies nor to German culture nor to the twentieth century (Zernack 2016).

It is immediately conspicuous how often political motives are involved in the reception of Norse mythology and heroic legend. Even the way in which it became widely known in Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century through Paul Henri Mallet's French translation of Snorri's *Edda*, published in Copenhagen in 1756, was the by-product of a political debate: about Denmark's prestige and simultaneously about liberalism and absolutism (see Volume 1 of this study, Chapters 4.2 and 4.5). Since then, many adaptations of Norse myths and heroic legend have implied political statements, not to mention more explicit mythological references in political speeches, debates, pamphlets and the like. The material is abundant and heterogeneous, and it is often not possible to distinguish clearly between mere allusions, political allegories and outright political propaganda. If one understands the latter

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as the systematic *Versuch von Personen oder Institutionen, einen bestimmten Adressatenkreis durch Informationslenkung für eigennützige Zwecke zu gewinnen und diese Zwecke zugleich zu verschleiern* ('attempt by persons or institutions to persuade a targeted group of addressees for self-serving purposes through directed information and at the same time to conceal these purposes', Kirchner 2005: 267), then not every mythological allusion used in a political context can or should be judged *a priori* as manipulative. In the present context, however, propagandist intention is very often obvious: for instance, in the popular practice of naming political groups as well as their magazines, concepts and strategies after terms borrowed from Old Norse mythology. Since the end of the nineteenth century, such names — like the mythological brand names used in commercial advertising — have often been supplemented by emblematic visual depictions, most frequently in media which can easily be distributed on a large scale. These include postcards, propaganda stamps and occasionally also posters and films (see Zernack 2009a and 2009b), but in recent times in particular the internet. Overall, clichéd elements of Norse myths and allusions to motifs from the Eddas have been used to convey political messages in all media suitable to spreading those messages, even if — on the whole — this does not actually happen very often, nor with the same intensity at all times. In addition, it needs to be stated that in those contexts it is primarily motifs from mythology and heroic legend which are contemporized, rather than other aspects of the pre-Christian religions of the North.

Mythological Allegories of Rulers

According to the Swedish historian of religion Folke Ström, the political use of the Old Norse gods began already at the court of the jarls of Hlaðir in Norway at the end of the tenth century. In Ström's view, the jarls' skalds intended to invest the pagan rulers with Óðinn's divine power and even identified Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson (d. *c*. 995) explicitly as Óðinn. Hallfreðr Óttarson's *Hákonardrápa* in particular is seen as 'political mythology at a high level of propaganda' (Ström 1981: 456). Indeed, the skalds' approach in some ways matches the definition of propaganda quoted above. Yet it is very different from the propagandistic use of myths in modern times, not least due to the disparate conditions of political communication in the respective eras: the veneration of heathen gods in modern times does not possess the same binding religious character it would have had at the court of Hlaðir, nor can we presume the existence of a 'public', which is a precondition for the broad effect of propaganda in the age of mass culture, for the tenth century. Nevertheless, it is of course possible to say that

the skalds generally knew how to employ allusions to pagan gods in order to emphasize their chieftains' claims to power.

The poetic celebration of rulers as descendants or 'reincarnations' of Norse gods, in particular Óðinn, remains a popular method for the symbolic legitimization of power for centuries. Thus, in the eighteenth century the Rurikid dynasty of Russian tsars not only traced its origin back to the Varangian Rurik, who according to the origin legend contained in the twelfth-century *Primary Chronicle* founded the first ruling dynasty of the Eastern Slavs and gave his name to the country of Russia, but through him to the divine ancestor Óðinn (see Volume 1, Chapters 1.5 and 5.7). A similar example can be found in Swedish art of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Here the medieval Icelandic narrative about the immigration of the Æsir to Scandinavia is used for political allegories intended to legitimize royal power. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was taken as historical fact that the Æsir under Óðinn's leadership migrated from Asia to Northern Europe around the time of the birth of Christ, civilized the local population and thus brought Scandinavian culture into being, as described in the medieval reports of Snorri's *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*. In several countries intellectuals were intrigued by this idea.[1] It was part of the Orientalism typical of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and its speculations about the historical ethnography of Europe, and it developed a particular potential for identification in modern Sweden, as Óðinn (Swedish Oden or Odin) was meant to have settled in the Swedish town of Sigtuna at the end of his travels, after the local king Gylfi (Swedish Gylfe) had readily ceded his power to him.

The Swedish kings Gustav III (1746–92) and Karl XIV Johan (1763–1844) recognized the possibilities for genealogical legitimization in references to Óðinn's migration. In 1790, Gustav III's court poet Carl Gustav af Leopold (1756–1829) composed a classical tragedy modelled on Corneille called *Oden eller Asarnas utvandring* ('Oden or the Emigration of the Æsir', Leopold 2005 [1796]). It centres on a (fictitious) conflict between Oden (Óðinn) and the Roman general Pompeius, whose military expansion into Asia Minor was the reason for the Æsir's migration to Scandinavia according to *Ynglinga saga*. In Leopold's work, this conflict is complicated in a classical manner by the appearance of a traitor and is overlaid with a love triangle. At the end of the eighteenth century this now forgotten piece aroused great interest, as it could easily be related to the contemporary political situation of Gustav's war against Russia

[1] It is only possible to mention a few examples of the extensive reception history of the migration legend. A reconstruction in a broader context can be found in Beck (1935); for a survey, see Zernack (forthcoming).

in the years 1788 to 1790: Pompeius's rapacious and proud Rome represents Catherine II's Russia, Oden stands for Gustav himself and Asmun, the traitor, for the conspirators of the *Anjalaforbundet* ('Anjala conspiracy'), Swedish and Finnish officers who in 1788 tried to arrange a peace agreement with the tsarina behind Gustav's back. It is doubtful that Leopold himself saw the migration legend in this light from the start (Holmberg 1954: 197–98). His primary goal may have been to furnish the king with a glorious past and an ancestor who was heroic enough to defy a famous Roman general.[2]

Having recourse to the migration of the Æsir was even more obvious for Karl XIV Johan, who was something of a migrant ruler himself: he had been born in France in 1763 as Jean Bernadotte and was elected crown prince of Sweden as a French marshal in 1810. He therefore had to put special emphasis on his legitimacy as king and used the symbolic potential of the past as well as that of art to propagate his identification as the immigrant Óðinn. This is evidenced by his commissions for the painters Pehr Hörberg (1774–1816) and Hjalmar Miörner (1794–1837) as well as the sculptor Bengt Erland Fogelberg (1786–1854). The resulting works amount to a royal programme of classicist representative art; it depicts the transfer of rule from Gylfi to Óðinn, the immigrant bringer of culture, as the foundational scene of Swedish kingship and at the same time stylizes Karl Johan as a new Óðinn (see Volume 1, Chapter 6.2.2; also Söderlind 2003; Stenroth 2012; Widén 2013).

One of the reflexes of such mythological allegories of rulers is the practice of exalting kings, politicians and other public persons as returning gods. Countless examples of this can be found well into the twentieth century. One from Sweden is Esaias Tegnér's poem *Nore* (1814) which describes the Swedish crown prince Carl August (1768–1810), who died before he was able to ascend the throne and in whom Tegnér had set his hopes for a peaceful unification of the North, as the peaceful ruler Baldr who had returned *förgäfves* ('in vain'; Tegnér 1919: 156). In an instance from Denmark, the patriotic poem *Das nordische Geheimniß* ('The Nordic Secret'), composed in German by the poet Jens Baggesen (1764–1826), expresses the expectation that King Frederik VI will become Baldr's successor after Ragnarök, *wenn die Welt sich selbst erneut* ('when the world renews itself'; Baggesen 1836: II, 147). In Germany, Chancellor Bismarck (1815–98) is mythically glorified as a new Baldr, Óðinn/Wodan, Þórr or Sigurd/Siegfried at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Zernack 2016: 259–60).

[2] Leopold's work is also discussed in Chapter 6.1.1 in Volume 1 of this study.

Collective Identities, Old Norse Mythology and Heroic Legend in the Age of Nations

While the identification of the ruler with the godhead seems to be typical of the political use of mythology in the Middle Ages and still in the eighteenth century, since the age of nations it is particularly the identity-forming recourse to mythology by communities — mostly ethnic or national (or indeed supranational) groups — which produces political statements. This can be seen in many places throughout Europe (and occasionally beyond), but from the end of the Napoleonic Wars onwards a wave of political exploitation of eddic material can be detected in particular in Scandinavia and — less frequently — in Germany.

In Scandinavia the example of Sweden shows that the transition between the two types of reception mentioned above is fluid. The idea of the migration of the Æsir also played a role in an emergent Swedish national identity: the encounter of the migrant prince Óðinn and the native ruler Gylfi was read not only as the foundational scene of Swedish kingship but also as the founding moment of the Swedish nation and thus a matter fit for a national epic. A number of Swedish poets attempted the composition of such an epic, particularly at the time of political upheaval which followed Sweden's loss of Finland to Russia in 1809, though they all failed: Pehr Henrik Ling (1776–1839) — an energetic proponent of Gothicism and today only remembered, if at all, as the inventor of 'Swedish' medical gymnastics — with his epic poems *Gylfe* (1814) and *Asarne* ('The Æsir', 1833 (orig. pub. 1816)), Anders Fredrik Skjöldebrand (1757–1834) and his heroic epic *Odin* (1816) and the Finnish Swede Gustaf Anton Brakel (1782–1853) with his tragedy *Oden i Svithiod* ('Óðinn in Svithiod', 1826). None of these works has found approval with posterity, mostly for aesthetic reasons (see, e.g., Almqvist 1849; Bandle 1992: 99–100; Hedman 2002: 8–24).

The hexametric epic *Gefion* (1814) by Eleonora Charlotta d'Albedyhll (1770–1835), the only female author who made use of the migration legend, has likewise been discarded and forgotten (but see also Volume 1 of this study, Chapter 5.3). It is still of interest in the present context as a political allegory with references to Norse mythology, not least because d'Albedyhll, unlike the aforementioned male writers, does not focus on the warrior-prince Óðinn. Her attention centres on the story of the goddess Gefion's settlement in Sweden which is contained in the migration legend. Chapter 5 of *Ynglinga saga* tells that during his migration, Óðinn sends Gefion ahead to Sweden in order to search for land (*á landaleitan*). There she demonstrates the superiority of the

Æsir to the Swedish king Gylfi in a dramatic manner when she manages to dispossess him of an enormous piece of land with the aid of supernatural powers. Both *Gylfaginning* (Chapter 1) and *Ynglinga saga* in this context quote a ninth-century stanza by the skald Bragi Boddason which describes in striking imagery how Gefion with the aid of four oxen ploughs a piece of land for 'the extension of Denmark' out of Gylfi's kingdom and pulls it westwards out to sea. In both sources the respective narrators comment that this was how the Danish island of Zealand and Lake Mälaren in Sweden were formed. According to *Ynglinga saga*, the oxen are Gefion's transformed sons whom she had fathered on her by a giant specifically for the deception of Gylfi.

D'Albedyhll omits precisely this element of deception and moves the action into a more mythical realm through the use of a kind of 'Homeric' plot device by having the gods of Asgård interfere in the human world. Gefion is sent to Earth by Odin as a bringer of culture in order to instruct the uncivilized inhabitants of the North in elementary cultural techniques such as fire-making, metal working and agriculture. This function of the goddess is found nowhere in the Old Norse sources; it is an addition by d'Albedyhll who is looking to create a female culture hero for Scandinavia. Under the impression of the Peace of Kiel (14 January 1814), under whose terms Denmark had to relinquish Norway to Sweden, d'Albedyhll does not interpret the migration legend in Swedish-patriotic fashion like the other authors, but in the sense of Scandinavism: Gefion's three (!) sons Nore, Swerker and Dan are embodiments of the Scandinavian countries, and the goddess herself appears as a personification of a peacefully united North. The guarantor of this is the 'peacemaking hero' (d'Albedyhll 1814: dedication, unpaginated) Karl XIV Johan, to whom the work is dedicated. D'Albedyhll's epic expresses a clear rejection of the male-dominated and warlike revanchist nationalism of the time (see Borgström 1991: 59–80; Benson 1914: 87–97) and shows through its interpretation of Gefion that — and how — gender roles were written into contemporary political debate.

The Peace of Kiel generated further literary mythological allegories. They demonstrate that the political references to mythology in Scandinavia were characterized by switches between those that related to individual national identities — mostly Danish or Swedish — and a supranational Nordic identity. For the Swedish poets d'Albedyhll and Tegnér (in the aforementioned poem *Nore*, written on the occasion of the Peace of Kiel) Norse mythology symbolizes the common past of the Nordic countries and the hope for a peaceful unification of the North, fuelled by the new union of Sweden and Norway (for the political references of Tegnér's *Nore*, see Edberg 1944). In 1815 the

theologian, politician and educator N. F. S. Grundtvig, however, writing from a Danish nationalist perspective, accentuates the inner conflicts of the North in a parody of the eddic poem *Þrymskviða* (thus again referring back to the shared mythology): he assigns Denmark (identified as Freyja) to the gods and Sweden (identified as the giant Þrymr) to the mythical enemies of the gods. The adversaries quarrel about Þórr's hammer Mjöllnir — Norway — which in the poem is stolen by Þrymr and then regained by the gods. Thus, Grundtvig's allegory accuses Sweden of stealing from Denmark, even if the theft will turn out to be unsuccessful in the long run (Lundgreen-Nielsen 2011: 17–18).

A similar tension between claims of national and supranational identity can be observed in the context of the so-called *studenterskandinavisme* ('Students' Scandinavism'), a political movement which originated in several Scandinavian universities. On the one hand, its proponents attempted to trace the idea of a political union of the Nordic countries back to their common antiquity with the help of the eddic gods and heroes. For a meeting of the students in Copenhagen on 13 January 1845, the artists Johan Thomas Lundbye (1818–48), Peter Christian Thamsen Skovgaard (1814–75) and Lorenz Frølich (1820–1908) decorated the indoor riding school of Christiansborg Palace with life-size images of them (documented in *Mindeblade om den Nordiske Højtid den 13. Januar 1845*; see Lundgreen Nielsen 2011: 24) and a blazing speech by the national-liberal politician Orla Lehmann (1810–70) saw the political union of Scandinavia as having been pre-empted *i de herlige Oltidssange, der tilhører alle Nordens Stammer* ('in those glorious poems of antiquity which belong to all peoples of the North' Lehmann 1873: 157). On the other hand, this idea of unity played into the hands of Danish national political interests. Denmark was quarrelling with its all-powerful southern neighbour Prussia about the national affiliation of the Duchy of Schleswig and relied on the military support of its Nordic 'brother-countries'. In this situation, the mythological reference turns the political quarrel into a conflict of cosmic proportions, evokes the cohesion of the Scandinavian peoples and vilifies the political opponent. Where the gods are figures of national identity (see Adriansen 2003: 105–07), the wartime enemy becomes an enemy of the gods: Grundtvig's magazine *Danskeren* ('The Dane') in 1851 refers to the Germans as 'rough frost giants' who need to be kept in check by Denmark with the help of Þórr's hammer (Zernack 2016: 256).

In the German-speaking world the Old Norse material at first also represents a supranational identity: it is understood as Germanic, and a few individual elements enter the national repository of symbols, though mostly at the margins. Attention is focused at first particularly on the Nibelung legend. In addition

to the Poetic Edda and *Völsunga saga*, this is also transmitted in a German version, the *Nibelungenlied* from around 1200, and feeds national symbolism also from this latter source (examples in von See 2006; Münkler and Storch 1988). Political interest in mythology appears only sporadically in German-language literature in the early nineteenth century; at the beginning mainly in relation to liberalism and its references to *deutsche Freiheit* ('German liberty'; Weiland 1986) as a national variation of the famous *libertas Germaniae*. In this context it is indeed for once the Germanic religion that is interpreted in a political fashion as a kind of antecedent of Protestantism and employed in relation to contemporary aspirations for liberty, for example, by Jacob Grimm (1785–1863; see Volume I, Chapter 4.2, Volume II, Chapters 2.1 and 3.5).

In contrast, political allusions to Old Norse mythology are used mainly by extreme nationalistic factions, sometimes with a decidedly aggressive and imperialistic undertone as in Felix Dahn's poem *Thors Hammerwurf* ('The Throw of Thor's Hammer', first published in *Harald und Theano* in 1855 and frequently reprinted; quoted in Zernack 2011: 167). It formulates a claim for world domination for German colonial policy which is meant to be authenticated symbolically by the reach of Thor's hammer *über die ganze Erde* ('over the whole Earth') which is of course not mentioned anywhere in the primary sources: *Wir sind von des Hammergottes Geschlecht | und wollen sein Weltreich erben* ('We are of the dynasty of the hammer god | and want to inherit his world kingdom'; see Zernack 2016: 258).

From the last third of the nineteenth century onwards, the Norse material is more often employed propagandistically in this narrower sense, after it had gained a higher profile particularly through Wagner's *Ring* operas. As almost always in the age of nationalistic ideologies, it is ethnic conflicts that stimulate mythology-related propaganda, in particular the ethnic conflicts at the edges of the German Empire and in the Habsburg monarchy. There the national associations in the polyethnic regions — the *Bund der Deutschen in Böhmen*, the *Verein Südmark*, the *Bund der Deutschen in Niederösterreich*, the *Deutsche Schulverein* and others — promote their political views through the use of Norse motifs of all kinds (considered to be 'Germanic'); the sales of relevant postcards and propaganda stamps help to finance the work of the association (examples in Zernack 2009: colour plates 15–16; Zernack 2011: colour plates 13–14). In both empires the different groups of the extreme nationalist *völkisch* movement occasionally have recourse to the motif inventory of Old Norse mythology and heroic legend for their political symbolism.

World War Propaganda

At the beginning of the First World War the Norse gods and heroes had become so established as symbols of German nationalism that they were used as a matter of course to contribute to the widespread enthusiasm for war. The aforementioned identification of the resurrected chancellor Bismarck with Norse gods and heroes was particularly popular in this context. The poet Richard Dehmel (1863–1920) preached to the German soldiers that Óðinn, Donar (Þórr) and Loki stood beside them in the field, in addition to the Christian God: *Füsilier, wenn du das linke Auge schließt | und mit sicherm Visier in die Feindesrotte schießt, | dann lebt Odin wieder in dir auf* ('Fusilier, when you close your left eye / and fire into the enemy pack with sure sight / then Odin lives again in you'; Bab 1914: 13). Others wish *Tod für immer* ('death forever') on France with Þórr's (or Donar's) help (see Zernack 2016: 258–60 for further examples). In view of the destruction wreaked by German troops in France and Belgium, such statements would have called up memories among Germany's enemies of Heinrich Heine's prophetic warning to the French from 1834 that Christianity could lose its binding power in Germany and *die alten steinernen Götter* ('the old stony gods') would rise again: *und Thor mit dem Riesenhammer springt endlich empor und zerschlägt die gotischen Dome* ('and Thor with the giant hammer finally jumps up and smashes the Gothic cathedrals'; Heine 1972: 306–07). French propaganda saw the arrival of the First World War as just such a German relapse into the merciless barbarity of heathendom: the nationalistic journalist Maurice Barrès (1862–1923) accused the German Emperor of worshipping the war gods Óðinn and Þórr in his article *Le Marteau de Thor sur nos Cathédrales* ('Thor's Hammer over our Cathedrals') from 1915, and in the same year an Épinal print (one of a sheet of pictures from Épinal in France) depicted Þórr as a monstrous cannibal, who cut a swathe of destruction through the country with his hammer raised (printed in Zernack 2016: 261). English-language war propaganda likewise supported its accusations of militarism against the German Empire with references to the resurrection of the pagan gods among the Germans and with their emperor: 'The God with whom the German Kaiser claims so close a partnership is really his ancestral God, Thor, and the Kaiser's "mailed fist" is merely Thors hammer up to date' (Le Gallienne 1918: 495).

After the First World War, the commemoration of the war and the soldiers who had fought in it attracted motifs from the Eddas (see Goebel 2007: 274–85). In the German-language area, one verse from the eddic poem *Hávamál* (stanza 77) gained particular popularity in the translation of Felix Genzmer from 1920: *Eins weiß ich | das ewig lebt: | Des Toten Tatenruhm* ('One

thing I know that lives forever: the fame of a dead man's deeds'). The final alliterative formula was used as an inscription on war memorials and thus gained importance in the context of the cult of the 'heroes' of the First World War, which was a central component of Nazi ideology. This has been imitated by far-right groups in the Federal Republic of Germany after 1945; they have been using the quotation from *Hávamál* as a kind of distinctive call sign up to the present day. During the Second World War, the 'Tatenruhm' aphorism served as part of a propaganda strategy that sought to legitimize the mass deaths as a meaningful self-sacrifice for the German people and the fatherland (see Zernack 2016: 242–53).

References to Ragnarök, the death of the gods, could be employed for similar purposes because in *Völuspá* (stanzas 59–65) and *Gylfaginning* (Chapter 53; *SnE* 2005: 53–54) this cataclysm is followed by the emergence of a new world. Wagner's opera *Götterdämmerung* ('Twilight of the Gods', 1876) had made this motif famous across the world: in the German Empire it was customary to use it to reinterpret even the most ruinous defeat as a prelude to future victory and national rebirth (see McClatchie 2008). Beyond this — and contrary to common assumption — Old Norse myths and heroic legend are not of any greater importance for the German Nationalist Socialist Party and its propaganda than they were for others at the turn of the previous century. It is significant that Hermann Göring (1893–1946) in his famous Stalingrad speech of 30 January 1943 (printed in Krüger 1991: 170–87) evokes the final fight of the Burgundians in Etzel's hall (i.e., a scene from the *Nibelungenlied*) and the Battle of Thermopylae rather than any Old Norse tales of *Tatenruhm* and Ragnarök in his endeavour to reinterpret senseless perseverance as a heroic fight 'to the last' (see Krüger 1991: 180).

Þórr as Guardian of National Interests

A comparison of the Danish and German examples shows that it is in no way the political milieux of the right and the far-right per se which rely on the expressive power of Old Norse mythology and heroic legend, but rather national ideologies. This can be seen beyond Denmark and Germany, for example, when the story of the Nibelungs was used to extend the British Empire's 'Britannia Rules the Waves' topos back into the Germanic past (e.g., in Arthur Peterson's epic *Andvari's Ring* from 1916). The manner in which motifs from the myths or from heroic legend are contemporized depends on the political shade of the respective national ideologies that interpret the same material in very different ways. As the discussion above shows, two dominant schools of

interpretation can be distinguished: the older of the two connects the peoples of the North or the Germanic peoples respectively to the idea of political freedom, has recourse to Tacitus and Montesquieu and uses the Old Norse material in particular to symbolize aspirations to liberty; the other evokes the Germanic peoples' impulse for expansion during the Migration Period with the obvious intention to legitimize contemporary claims for power or territory by establishing supposedly ancient rights. The coexistence of these two lines of reception, which may even overlap, is particularly evident in the interpretation of the god Þórr (on this, see in general Arnold 2011). His mythological duty to defend the world of gods and men against the attacks of the giants makes him appear as an ambivalent figure — guardian and aggressor in one — even in the oldest sources. Thus the *völkisch* nationalist Felix Dahn who was quoted above is able to make use of the figure of Þórr to justify German imperialistic demands for 'worldwide recognition' (*Weltgeltung*) in the context of German colonial policy and thereby serve a tradition that continues into the propaganda of the First World War and beyond, while — almost at the same time — the poet and liberal politician Ludwig Uhland (1787–1862) connects the same god to what he calls the 'democratic element' as *Schutzherr der Erde und ihrer Bewohner* ('guardian of the Earth and its inhabitants'; Uhland 1836: 220–22). This latter view finds its echo in the programme of the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, *KPD*) in 1918:

> Dort, wo die millionenköpfige Proletariermasse die ganze Staatsgewalt mit ihrer schwieligen Faust ergreift, um sie, wie der Gott Thor seinen Hammer, den herrschenden Klassen aufs Haupt zu schmettern: dort allein ist die Demokratie, die kein Volksbetrug ist.[3]
>
> (Where the million-headed proletarian body grasps the entire power of the state in its calloused fist in order to smash it onto the head of the ruling classes, like the god Þórr with his hammer: only there does a democracy exist which is not a betrayal of the people.)

This quotation points to the fact that in addition to nations, social classes may also try to stabilize their collective identity through references to myths. However, such examples are rare, particularly in reference to the god Þórr.

In Germany Þórr is mainly enlisted as the personification of destructiveness and desire for conquest and as an incarnation of war. Scandinavians, however,

[3] *Programm der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands* (1918) <www.marxists.org/deutsch/geschichte/deutsch/kpd/1918/programm.htm> [accessed 4 June 2017].

celebrate him as a national guardian deity. The poet Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910), for instance, believes that his 'hammer sign' is inscribed into the Norwegian national flag (see Zernack 2011: 163). In Denmark, Thor has been the embodiment of essential Danishness, called *danskhed* since Grundtvig's time.

Even beyond the reception of the god Þórr, the national politics of myth in Scandinavia stands under the influence of liberalism. It is connected to the fight of the farmers for liberty and democracy, particularly when read along the lines of the Grundtvigian *folkehøjskoler* ('Folk High Schools'; see Lönnroth 1979). However, when this was running alongside the fight against German rule in Schleswig after the Second Schleswig War of 1864, the references to mythology started to imply an element of instigation (Lönnroth 1996: 159). They are still employed in this way in the twentieth century whenever it seems necessary to symbolically guard Danish integrity, in whichever way this is understood: in 1920 against the German claim to Southern Jutland; in 1940 to 1945 against the German occupation; in the 1960s and '70s against the Establishment or against the European Community — all of them are condemned as incarnations of evil as embodied by the wolf Fenrir (Lönnroth 1996: 164–68).

Political References to Old Norse Gods and Heroes since 1945

On the whole, political references to Old Norse gods and heroes became rarer in the early part of the second half of the twentieth century. They have increased again only in the last thirty years after the Vikings moved into the focus of popular culture. Those who make reference to Norse material with a political intention now often try to profit from the propagandistic connotations those symbols have gained through earlier (mis)use. This can be seen clearly with regard to the political symbolism of the German extreme right which has been making use of Old Norse mythology — considered as Germanic — since the early 1990s: right-wing extremists particularly employ the supposed *Hávamál* quotation about *Tatenruhm* to signal their affinity with National Socialism without having to have recourse to unconstitutional symbols like the swastika. As with the *völkisch* groups of the nineteenth century, Old Norse mythology serves as a resource for the names of magazines, mail order companies or any kind of group. Among them are a number of bands such Odins Erben ('Óðinn's Heirs'), Legion of Thor, Utgard, Ragnarök and others whose music plays an important role in creating internal bonds of cohesion in a right-wing environment partly made up of teenagers and young adults. The song lyrics are replete with propagandistically charged allusions to the Eddas, such as the setting to music of Genzmer's *Tatenruhm* stanza by the German black metal band

Barbaryan or the lyrics of the neo-Nazi band Absurd, to give only these examples (see Schuppener 2009 with numerous further examples; also Goodrick Clarke 2002: ch. 10). In this genre in particular the propagandistic reception of Old Norse material tends towards the idealization of violence. It is directed against Judaism, Christianity and more recently Islam and, as in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, reflects a pushback against a multi-ethnic society, even if one of a completely different composition. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, it has been possible to observe such tendencies outside the German-speaking world as far away as North America, coupled with a fascination with the gods Óðinn and Þórr in particular, who are associated with war and fighting, as well as with Ragnarök, which is seen as a metaphor for revolution. Unlike a hundred years ago, such ideas are quickly disseminated internationally via the internet.

The Preferred Motifs of Political References to Mythology and Heroic Legend

The Norse gods and heroes are among a multitude of symbols from history and legend that are used in the creation of identity-generating stories or images in order to mould communities which have developed by chance into 'imagined communities' in Benedict Anderson's (1983) sense. The recourse to myth and legend is not only intended to make a claim for the immemorial age of these communities: it is likewise used to hold the groups together by distinguishing them from other groups. In addition to mythological characters, places and events, heroic motifs from the Nibelung legend in particular are popular for this purpose. While some motifs from the stories of the Norse gods and heroes are more suitable to political and propagandistic use than others, the relation of the content to its supposed political message is always remarkably loose. Thus one and the same motif is open to contradictory political interpretations, as can be illustrated by two examples from the beginning of the twenty-first century: while the Danish website *balder.org* invokes Baldr's name to vilify Islam and deny the Holocaust, in Norway the same god serves as the pacifist symbol of a magazine for conscientious objectors (*Balder: Magasin for militærnektere* 1991–2010).

This shows that specific properties or characteristics of the mythological characters, places and events play only a small part in their suitability for political use. Rather, their suitability is often determined by the function they fulfil in their mythological world and derives from their place in the space-time structure of the myths as well as from their relation to the fundamental antagonism between gods and giants. Thus Óðinn, the highest of the gods, almost

always lends himself to being used as the personification of an identificatory reference to a supposed Germanic origin, while during times of ethnic conflict and unmet territorial demands the guardians of the mythical antagonism gain in popularity: Þórr, who fights the giants in order to defend Miðgarðr and Ásgarðr against Útgarðr, and Heimdallr, who guards the bridge between the worlds. Again, they can be made to support different political interests: for instance, in the German Empire of the early twentieth century Heimdallr simultaneously symbolizes the identities of both the Danish minority and the Pan-Germans, two groups which pursued mutually incompatible political goals (Zernack 2016: 266–68).

The political and propagandistic interest in Ragnarök draws its power from the temporal structure of Norse mythology, as it is interpreted as a metaphor for a time of upheaval. The idea of the end of the gods with the expectation of the formation of a new world provides very different chiliastic notions of history with memorable imagery, which allows their adherents to see promises of future greatness even in collapse. What this greatness is meant to consist of is once again completely unrelated to the Ragnarök myths as they have been transmitted: in the second half of the nineteenth century, they provided the British socialist William Morris (1834–96) with a model for his utopia of a socialist community (Spinozzi 2011); for the Norwegian Ragnarok Circle, which had national-socialist tendencies but was in opposition to the German occupation of Norway (Emberland 2003), and for German right-wing extremists they embody the longed-for overthrow of the political order. For the Allies they were symbols of the imminent downfall of the Third Reich. The Wagnerian term *Götterdämmerung* is in vogue everywhere to describe this phenomenon (McClatchie 2008: 184–85).

On the whole, the gods Óðinn and Þórr dominate the selective perception of Old Norse myths by political propaganda. Other characters occur much more rarely; in addition to Heimdallr and Ragnarök there are Baldr and the valkyries who appear not only as battle maidens but, like Heimdallr, as celestial frontier-guards (a role they do not have in the sources). In contrast, D'Albedyhll's allegorical use of the goddess Gefion, discussed above, is a singular case, as is the propagandistic upgrade of the sea giant Ægir into an anti-British embodiment of the German claim for naval power during the First World War (see Zernack 2009a). Not least, Old Norse mythology is even forced to contribute a symbol for propaganda itself, in the form of Þórr's hammer Mjöllnir, for instance: when the (tiny) Icelandic nationalist socialist party *Flokkur Þjóðernissinna* publishes a magazine with the title *Mjölnir*; when the anti-Semitic German publicist Theodor Fritsch alias Fritz Thor (1852–1933) gives the name *Hammer*

to his propaganda newspaper, published from 1902 to 1940 (Puschner 2015); or when the Nazi graphic artist Hans Herbert Schweitzer (1901–80) signs his designs for propaganda posters with the pseudonym 'Mjölnir' (Paret 2001).

Concluding Remarks

In closing it is necessary to return to the observation made at the beginning of this chapter that Old Norse mythology and heroic legend are employed particularly frequently in the context of political statements. The examples discussed in the present essay demonstrate that explanations for this phenomenon should be looked for on two levels: namely, the mythological tradition itself and the history of its reception. First, the antagonistic structure of the mythical community of gods and giants evidently suggests to many recipients that Old Norse mythology anticipates the principle of 'inclusion by exclusion' for the formation of collective identity, as described by modern scholarship on nationalism. The rich eschatological imagery of Norse mythology also offers many points of connection for political symbolism: the idea of a renewal of the world after Ragnarök and the return of Baldr both lend themselves to messianic political claims. Second, this material is charged with meaning external to itself which it has gained during the course of its reception history and which is contemporized in every new act of reception together with the primary motifs from mythology and heroic legend. Various communities ascribe identity-generating potential to this material as the embodiment of their age-old selves and at the same time assign it the function of distinguishing the community from other groups. This gesture of demarcation is inherent in the reception history of Old Norse mythology outside Scandinavia from the eighteenth century onwards. As a modern construction, Old Norse mythology is from the beginning set in opposition: to the Roman, the classical and classicism. Even when these concepts are no longer dominant, the idea that they embody an opposition or alternative (to whatever concept) sticks like an empty shell to everything Old Norse, Nordic or Germanic and allows it to be exploited for practically any political or ideological need.

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9.2 – Germanic Neopaganism

Stefanie von Schnurbein

The lively interest in Norse mythological texts evident since the late seventeenth century and most prominently seen in European Romanticism happened within the framework of a culture thoroughly dominated by Christianity, more specifically the Lutheranism of Germany and the Scandinavian countries. But when and where did the reception of pre-Christian myth of the North become religious in itself, and how was this variety of Neopagan religiosity or spirituality transformed in different contexts throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? These are the questions considered in the following discussion of the transformations of Germanic Neopaganism (today often called Asatru or Heathenism).[1]

The first calls to use Eddic texts (or rather, the literary and cultural imaginations they had sparked in the early nineteenth century) for religious purposes emerged in the newly united German Empire after the Franco-Prussian war of

[1] The findings and arguments in this chapter are based on several books I have written on the topic of Germanic Neopaganism and on extensive fieldwork and interviews conducted in Asatru groups in the late 1980s as well as in 2010. Unless noted otherwise, the discussion of the emergence of Germanic Neopaganism is based on these publications and the sources used there: Schnurbein 1992; Schnurbein 1993; Schnurbein 2016.

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1870–71. Already in 1835 Jacob Grimm had argued in his *Deutsche Mythologie* ('Teutonic Mythology') that the Old Norse material was part of a common Germanic heritage and therefore closer to the German mentality than the ultimately 'foreign' Christian mythologies (Kellner 1994). By the time the new political unity of the German territories was achieved, using these materials made it seem possible to counter a perceived spiritual lack in German national unification caused by the division of the German territories along confessional lines between Catholic and Protestant areas, neither of which was fully able to serve as a national German religion. However, the initial promoters of the forging of a properly German religion, for example, the eminent German Orientalist Paul de Lagarde, still did not leave the framework of the established churches (Paul 1996). This was to change with the advent of the ultra-nationalist *völkisch* movement for which Lagarde served as a kind of 'prophet'.

From the last decade of the nineteenth century *völkisch* ideology envisioned a renewal or rebirth of the German people, or *Volk*, living in unity with its territory, its culture and its racial substance. The radical political agenda of this 'palingenetic nationalism' (Griffin 1991) with its revivalist rhetoric was acutely concerned with the search for a religion that was suitable and indigenous for this reborn German *Volk* — a search that caused fierce controversy. While a majority of *völkisch* thinkers favoured a Christianity purged of its Jewish roots, the so-called Ariosophy and the German Faith Movement sought to (re)create a religion appropriate for the German people, the Germanic folk-soul or the Nordic or Aryan race in opposition to or beyond Christianity, as they saw the latter as not only culturally, but also racially foreign.

At the same time, occultism and theosophy as well as anticlericalism and scientism became increasingly popular in Western Europe towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, leading many to leave church dogma and experiment with new religious forms. Amalgamating the search for a national German religion within the nationalist and *völkisch* movement with modern occultism, anticlericalism and scientism opened the way for attempts to revive a pre-Christian German(ic) religion on the basis of Eddic material and research about it.

German völkisch *Religion*

In the first decades of the twentieth century, a number of Germanophile religious and spiritual associations began to grow out of the contradictory blend of turn-of-the-century ideas and ideologies of spiritual, national and racial renewal. Early groups such as the *Deutschbund* ('German Union', founded in

1894) and *Deutschreligiöser Bund* ('German Religious Union', 1903) promoted a German Christianity in the wake of Lagarde.

A number of programmatic publications in the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, by Ernst Wachler (1871–1945) and Ludwig Fahrenkrog (1867–1952) (Fahrenkrog 1907, 1908b, 1908c; Wachler 1930 [1900]), moved beyond Christianity altogether, paving the way for the establishment of Germanic Neopagan groups after 1910. In 1912, Ludwig Fahrenkrog, Wilhelm Schwaner and Karl Weißleder established the *Germanisch-deutsche Religions-Gemeinschaft*. This community promised a religious alternative on an explicitly racial basis to those who felt alienated from the Christian churches (Anonymous 1912). In 1913, the group was renamed *Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft* ('German Belief Fellowship'). A similar, albeit competing group, the *Deutscher Orden* ('German Order') and the associated *Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft* ('German Faith Fellowship') were established in 1911 by Otto Sigfrid Reuter, another important early protagonist of the German Faith Movement.

Next to German Christianity and German Faith, a third important impulse for the spirituality, ideology and practice of German(ic) Faith came from the overtly racial esoteric version of modern occultism, which gave itself the telling name Ariosophy. Ariosophy emerged from the theosophical movement and remained in close connection with it, but sought to eliminate its Far Eastern elements, reaching instead back to Germanic religion. The first popular author to combine occultism and theosophy with an explicitly *völkisch* ideology was Guido (von) List (1848–1919), an Austrian journalist and author of *völkisch* novels and plays,[2] and an activist in numerous right-wing groups. After a temporary loss of vision in 1902, List claimed to have had visions of earlier incarnations, purported to have access to what he called the ancestral memory (*Erberinnerung*) of the 'Ario-Germans' and began to 'reveal' the mystic origins of the runes and language in general. A number of Viennese and German dignitaries founded the *Guido-von-List-Gesellschaft* ('Guido von List Society') in 1908, which promoted his ideas and financed his numerous publications. List himself never established a religious organization, except for a minuscule circle of initiates called *Hoher Armanen Orden* (HAO, 'High Armanic Order') (Goodrick-Clarke 1985: 46–47). The main purpose of the Wuotanist religion promoted by List was the preservation of the superior Aryan race and the breeding of an even higher noble race through the succession of numerous incarnations. List's most original and enduring contribution to this racially

[2] For biographical detail on List, see Goodrick-Clarke (1985).

radicalized theosophic system was his claim to have found a key to the original sacred language of the Ario-Germans in the runes. In his work *Das Geheimnis der Runen* ('The Secret of the Runes', 1908), the pioneer of *völkisch* rune occultism developed an intricate system of correspondences, which laid the foundation for most modern versions of rune divination (cf. Puschner 2001: 27–48).

Völkisch religion remained notoriously split amongst factions and idiosyncratic activists who each had their own personal mythology and claim to leadership. Continual attempts to (re)unite the movement and to form umbrella organizations accompanied this tendency.[3] The best-known endeavour was launched in 1933 by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1882–1962) in the wake of Hitler's and National Socialism's rise to power. The internationally renowned Indologist and long-term activist in Germanic Faith contexts had been campaigning for years to unite all non-Christian, German religious splinter groups into one movement, and finally founded the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* ('Work Fellowship German Faith Movement'). But Hauer's ambition for his movement to become the official religion of the 'Third Reich' was quickly thwarted. A number of subgroups resigned from membership soon after the movement's foundation because they did not accept Hauer's claim to leadership or else had their own sectarian agendas. At the same time, Hitler's power politics needed the support of the established churches and had no room for dissenting religious movements. In spite of the fact that *völkisch* religious and Aryan occult ideas were cultivated in certain National Socialist circles, for example, by Hitler's 'chief ideologist' Alfred Rosenberg and his *Amt Rosenberg*[4] as well as in Heinrich Himmler's *SS*,[5] neither Ariosophy nor Germanic Faith groups in general gained widespread positive recognition.

The significance of the whole Germanic religious movement did not lie in the numbers of its adherents.[6] But it counted amongst its ranks a considerable number of journalists, writers, artists, illustrators, teachers and scholars — (mostly male) members of an intellectual middle-class who were driven by

[3] For the following, see Nanko (1993: 44–49).

[4] The *Amt Rosenberg* promoted research on alleged pre-Christian cults and folklore and used it as the basis for developing non-Christian celebrations, a new German ritual tradition. Cf. Piper (2012: 346) and Gajek (2001).

[5] *SS* leader Heinrich Himmler sported an intense interest in popular *völkisch* historical theories and occult speculation and for a while employed the 'magician' Karl Maria Wiligut (1866–1946), called 'Weisthor' or 'Himmler's Rasputin', who claimed to have direct access to the Aryan ancestral memory; cf. Goodrick-Clarke (1985: 177–91).

[6] For an estimate of membership numbers in the individual groups, see Nanko (1993).

the fear of losing influence and status in modern society. They proved to be active and effective disseminators of Neopagan ideas. Their imaginations of lost and regained national and cultural greatness fell on fertile ground, especially in the urban middle classes, who were driven by similar fears and hopes in connection with the rapid modernization, industrialization and urbanization of their country. Due to their activities and ideas about the nature of a pre-Christian Germanic faith and its renewal, concepts related to Germanic Neopagan religion were able to take hold in other alternative movements such as the environmental movement, as well as in the academy and, most notably, in the aesthetic imagination: in literature, theatre and music. Thus, German(ic) religious thought and a racialized or *völkisch* religion became more established in the 1920s and '30s, and the foundation was laid for the further development of a neo-Germanic religion later on in the twentieth century.

German Faith ideas started to spread internationally — albeit on a modest scale — already in the 1920s and 30s. The *Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft*, for instance, established and maintained contacts in the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries through the *Germanen-Ring* (Nanko 1993: 46). In Sweden, the cultural society *Samfundet Manhem*, founded in 1934, gathered sympathizers with National Socialism and maintained contacts with the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* (Gerdmar 2012). Hauer's ideas spread in Norway through the circle around Hans S. Jacobsen and his journal *Ragnarok* — a small National Socialist subculture which opposed the official National Socialist party's leader Vidkun Quisling, promoted a more radically racist and anti-Semitic approach and fostered a racial Nordic Heathen religion inspired by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer's ideas (cf. Emberland 2003).

The Australian lawyer Alexander Rud Mills (1885–1964) transferred Germanic Neopagan ideas into an Anglo-American context. Using his contacts with British and German National Socialists and convinced of Anglo-Saxon supremacy, he founded the *Anglecyn Church of Odin* in the 1930s and published his ideas of a racial, anti-Semitic and anti-Christian religion in his main work, *The Odinist Religion: Overcoming Jewish Christianity* (1939) (Mills 1939; cf. Kaplan 1997: 15–16; Gardell 2003: 167–70).

The very limited efficacy of Germanic Faith and Ariosophic groups in Germany between 1933 and 1945 affected the further development of Germanic Neopaganism in the 1950s and '60s in paradoxical ways. The organizational structures of neo-Germanic groups were largely destroyed, the membership reduced to a few faithful individuals and *völkisch* ideology in general discredited. But at the same time *völkisch* religious groups profited from the fact of their persecution and reorganized under the protection of the new West German

constitution that granted freedom of religion. Thus the remaining members of the Ariosophic *Guido-von-List-Society* continued their activities immediately after 1945 based on the 1936 statutes. In 1951 Wilhelm Kusserow founded the *Artgemeinschaft*[7] as a continuation of the *Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft* which had split off from the *Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft* in 1927. In 1957, the *Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft* was re-established as well, and in the same year, Hermann Musfeldt founded the *Goden-Orden*, championing a race-based Ariosophy-inspired religion.[8]

Leading members of the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, including its founder Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, divided into two organizations after 1945:[9] the religious *Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft* ('German Unitarian Religious Community', *DUR*)[10] and the academically oriented *Freie Akademie* ('Free Academy') (cf. Nanko 1995). Together with the aforementioned religious groups, these cultural organizations played an integral role as communicative centres where organized right-wing extremism was able to regroup.

The Asatru Revival of the 1970s

Today, Asatruers and many of those who study them know little about their religion's prehistory in the German *völkisch* movement and its revival in post-War Germany. They tell the founding myth of an astonishingly spontaneous and independent appearance of unrelated Germanic Neopagan groups in different countries: Britain, the United States, Iceland, Sweden and Germany — a phenomenon which some interpret as the resurfacing of archetypal mythic and religious powers. Nevertheless, *völkisch* religious groups and ideologies such as German Faith, Ariosophy and Odinism not only regrouped but also recruited a younger clientele in the 1970s and thus fed into the allegedly spontaneously arising new Asatru movement. At the same time, the growing popularity of

[7] The term is hard to translate into English. In German, *Art* is a biological term meaning 'species' and has been used to avoid using the term 'race'. *Artgemeinschaft* thus refers to the community of our kind, our nature, our ways, or, in fact, our race.

[8] For an account of the early history of the *Goden-Orden* see their journal *Die kosmische Wahrheit. Kosmisch-religiöse Blätter zur Pflege persönlichen Lebens* ('The Cosmic Truth. Cosmic-Religious Papers for the Cultivation of Personal Life'), here no. 10 (1964), 4.

[9] The post-war regrouping of the former *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* is outlined in Nanko (2004).

[10] For an account of the German branch of the Unitarian faith, which took a very different path from its liberal North American counterpart, see the (apologetic) account by Wolfgang Seibert (1989) and the critical, but simplistic investigation by Peter Kratz (1994).

Wicca, the New Age and the esoteric movement awakened the interest of a broader counter-cultural public in non-Christian religious alternatives. These currents intersected in complex ways. Having had ties to the Western occultist tradition all along, Germanic Neopaganism opened up to new alternative religious ideas. Simultaneously, spiritual counter-cultures harking back to Romantic ideas of survival and revival developed an interest in 'indigenous' cultural and religious traditions. The idea of a faith rooted in pre-Christian Northern Europe did not seem far-fetched any longer.

The emergence and development of Asatru since the 1970s can be roughly divided into two periods. First, a period of foundation in the 1970s and 80s, during which the first Asatru groups were formed in Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Britain, and the United States, and the *völkisch* religious community in Germany started its renewal. This period was marked by controversies about what role 'race' was to play for the new-old religion. Second, a period of establishment and consolidation in the 1990s and 2000s, when the controversies of the first period peaked, initiating a process of reformation and adaptation to the surrounding societies, their changing perceptions and their organization of religions. During this period an outspokenly a-racist Asatru started to gain ground.

At this point it is appropriate to introduce a note about terminology. I distinguish between three types of Asatru or Heathenism: 1) Racial religious approaches base religion on a biological concept of race and promote a radical *völkisch* racial ideology along with ideas of racial and religious purity and purification. 2) Ethnicist approaches see the basis of religion in a traditional, homogenous heritage that is to be preserved or restored. This heritage is not exclusively conceptualized in biological terms, but is seen as rooted in landscape, nature, climate and culture as well. The ethnicist faction tends toward a cultural essentialism which sees culture as an immutable and ideally homogenous entity rooted in a deep past — an idea which often carries with it a desire to purify and rehomogenize this alleged essential, traditional culture. 3) A-racist Asatruers reject the category of race and go against conflating biological heritage and religion. It is generally inclusive of individuals of all backgrounds, but does not necessarily go actively against racism, as the term 'anti-racist' would suggest. This faction tends to conceptualize culture in a more dynamic way, as something that is to be created and that is continually transformed through cultural exchange and mixing.[11]

[11] In discussions about Asatru, the a-racist faction is frequently called 'universalist', the ethnicist faction 'folkish'. For a further discussion, see below as well as Schnurbein (2016).

In Germany, the right-wing religious milieu's opening to popular New Age and esoteric currents was initiated by the *Armanen-Orden* (founded in 1976) and its leaders, Adolf and Sigrun Schleipfer (who later called herself Sigrun von Schlichting), two long-term activists in the *völkisch* religious and right-wing extremist scene.[12] The racial-religious *Armanen-Orden* promotes a racial mysticism inspired by Guido von List's and other Ariosophists' teachings. In the 1980s, it began to include popular Celtic elements, teachings from the emerging goddess movement and feminist spirituality, and elements of a popularized Native American spirituality and was thus able to attract younger members not only from the right-wing political spectrum but also from the broader alternative religious milieu. The racial-religious *Artgemeinschaft* entered a phase of renewal in the early 1980s as well. Its new leader, the Hamburg right-wing lawyer Jürgen Rieger attracted young political activists to the group which he led until his death in 2009.[13]

The first groups in Germany that promoted a religion resembling modern Asatru were founded in the 1980s by younger members of the *Artgemeinschaft* and the *Armanen-Orden* in Berlin, amongst them the *Heidnische Gemeinschaft* and *ANSE* (see below). The *Heidnische Gemeinschaft* ('Heathen Community') was founded by Géza von Neményi in 1985. Neményi eventually left the group and reactivated Ludwig Fahrenkrog's *Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft* (*GGG*) in 1991, harking back to one of the first Germanic Faith groups in Germany. These ethnicist groups were the first to turn away from Ariosophic beliefs and aimed at reconstructing an allegedly authentic Germanic religion based on Old Icelandic sources and relevant research within folklore and archaeology. They also installed statutes requiring their members to distance themselves from 'fascism and racism', holding fast to a strongly ethnicist line. Competing with the *GGG* was another umbrella organization, the racial-religious *Arbeitsgemeinschaft naturreligiöser Stammesverbände Europas* (*ANSE*, 'Working Group of Nature Religious Tribal Associations of Europe'), founded by Sigrun von Schlichting in 1990. For a number of years it served as a networking platform for different Neogermanic groups, and organized national and international meetings.

The international network, to which the *ANSE* as well as the *GGG* belonged also included the ethnicist English *Odinic Rite*, one of the earliest and most

[12] For a thorough account of 1970s and 80s Germanic Neopaganism in Germany, see Schnurbein (1992).

[13] For Rieger's political activities, cf. Wetzel (1994: 171), Christiansen, Fromm and Zinser (2004: 149–52) and Hoyningen-Huene (2003: 232–33).

internationally influential post-war Heathen foundations. It goes back to the initiative of John Yeowell, who in his youth had been a member of the French Foreign Legion and a bodyguard for British fascist leader Oswald Mosley.[14] Yeowell was inspired by John Gibbs-Bailey, who had been an Odinist since the 1930s (and thus had probably had contact with Alexander Rud Mills's teachings). In 1973, the two men, under the pseudonyms Stubba and Hoskuld, took the initiative of forming the *Committee for the Restoration of the Odinic Rite* which was dissolved and converted into the *Odinic Rite* in 1979, and then registered as an official charity in 1988. With its slogan 'Faith, Folk, Family' and the claim that Odinism is the 'organic religion of the Northern-European peoples' (cf. Schnurbein 1992: 138), the tightly structured group, which bases its coherence on a system of life-long oaths, established itself as a leading ethnicist Asatru group early on.

Alexander Rud Mills's 1930s version of Odinism was particularly influential for one of the new groups in the United States, Else Christensen's *Odinist Fellowship*. The inception of the *Odinist Fellowship* is a prime example of the international roots of radical racial-religious Asatru. Else Christensen (1913–2005)[15] was a native of Denmark, where she was involved at a young age with both revolutionary unionism and the national Bolshevist wing of the early National Socialist movement. After her emigration to Canada in 1951, she pursued further 'her interest in class-based racial radicalism' (Gardell 2003: 167) and discovered the writings of Alexander Rud Mills. Christensen combined Mills's theories with those of the American anti-Semitic National Socialist Francis Parker Yockey and with Jungian philosophy. From this, she developed Odinism as a racial religion.

According to his own retrospective claims, the founder of the other influential early North American Asatru group, Stephen McNallen, did not have a racial agenda when he established the *Viking Brotherhood* around 1970. Rather, it was spurred by an anti-clerical tendency (Gardell 2003; cf. Kaplan 1997: 18). Once his group had been renamed the *Asatru Free Assembly* (*AFA*) in the mid-1970s, he started adopting the ethnicist assumption of 'an innate connection between Germanic Paganism and the Germanic peoples' (McNallen 2003–04: 207). Accusations and internal controversies around the *AFA*'s involvement with racists and National Socialists caused considerable turmoil

[14] This claim was made by an early member of the *OR*, Stephen Flowers/Edred Thorsson. Cf. Edred (2007: 103).

[15] For information on Else Christensen, see Gardell (2003: 166–74).

in the 1980s. It remains unclear to what degree these controversies contributed to the dissolution of the *AFA* around 1986 (cf. Kaplan 1997: 19; Gardell 2003: 260; McNallen 2003–04: 208–09). However, the disagreements around racial-religious and ethnicist versions of Asatru persisted into the 1990s, when former *AFA* members started the current leading Asatru groups in the United States: *The Troth*, *Asatru Folk Assembly* and the *Asatru Alliance*.

As we have seen, modern Asatru in Germany, Britain, and the United States had links to *völkisch* religious ideology: either directly, as in the German case, or indirectly through Odinism, in the Anglo-American cases. Early attempts at installing Asatru as a religious alternative in the Scandinavian countries differ from this picture. They seem to mainly emerge out of counter-cultural impulses. This is true as well for the most nationally successful and most internationally important newly founded Asatru group of the 1970s, the Icelandic *Ásatrúarfélagið* ('Asatru Association' or *Ásatrúarmenn*, 'Asatru-Men', as they were called initially), which was formed around 1972. Nevertheless, this counter-cultural, a-racist group was supported considerably by a group called *Nýalssinna* in its years of establishment. This spiritist organization was founded in 1950 based on the writings of geologist Dr Helgi Pétursson. It combined spiritist, theosophical and nationalist ideas with scientific elements, claiming that the spirits who appeared in séances were inhabitants of other planets and communicated with humans through dreams and telepathic means. For Pétursson, the Nordic gods were denizens of remote stars who had supposedly reached a higher level of consciousness. They were now active as spiritual leaders of mankind, speaking especially to the supposedly highly developed Icelanders (cf. Pétursson 1983: 164 and 169–70). According to church historian Pétur Pétursson, it was the support of members of *Nýalssinna*, not least its leader Þórsteinn Guðjónsson, which provided the organizational structure and public relations know-how (Pétur Pétursson 1985: 10) required to attain official government recognition as early as 1973 — a fact which gave rise to the suspicion that the group might have had ties to racist and even National Socialist ideologies. Such allegations were eventually refuted by pointing to the fact that National Socialism was not a Neopagan movement but rather closely allied with the Christian churches, and also by combining the application for government recognition with a call for 'true freedom of religion' (Pétur Pétursson 1985: 7–12). The inner coherence of the membership (consisting of heterogeneous counter-cultural, anti-clerical and nationalist circles) and the development of rituals in the 1970s and 80s was the work of one charismatic man: its religious leader, *Allsherjargóði* Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson (1924–93). The farmer and autodidactic poet of the traditional Icelandic genre of *rímur* was

already a well-known character by the time he gained the status of a key figure for Asatruers worldwide.

Due to Iceland's official recognition of Asatru, its community became the most significant internationally. Sweden, by comparison, sported the most lively and diverse milieu in the Nordic countries. It was comprised of a number of small groups representing everything from loose networks to hierarchical initiatory groups, and from a-racist New Age interpretations of the Nordic to strictly ethnicist and nationalist understandings of Asatru. The first attempt to establish an organized group, the ethnicist *Breidablikk-Gildet*, was made in 1975 by Arne Sjöberg (1921–2000). Sjöberg had a background in Sweden's equivalent to the life reform movement, the teetotal *Frisksportrörelsen* ('Movement for Sport and Health'). *Breidablikk-Gildet* was organized as an order, with an initiatory structure modelled on the Good Templars. It had its most successful period in the mid-1980s with an estimated 130 members, but folded after Arne Sjöberg's death in 2000 (Skott 2000: 91).

Breidablikk-Gildet's ethnicist and nationalist orientation facilitated contacts with militant right-wing milieux, resulting in controversies with an a-racist group that was influential in the formation of later Asatru, the neo-shamanic network *Yggdrasil* (Schnurbein 1992: 196–97; Gregorius 2008: 91). *Yggdrasil* grew out of a small group in Stockholm which cultivated an interest in neo-shamanism in the wake of the popularity of Carlos Castaneda's books (Gregorius 2008: 95). This group launched the journal *Gimle* and founded the 'Network for Nordic Shamanism' in 1982. American neo-shaman Michael Harner's visit to Sweden in 1983, and his courses on 'core-shamanism', inspired more practical explorations of shamanism. *Yggdrasil* then went on to collectively design the Swedish version of Norse shamanism called *seid* (Lindqvist 1997).[16]

In contrast to Sweden and Iceland, Danish and Norwegian Asatru did not emerge seriously until the 1990s. An exception is a small group in Norway, which started as a counter-cultural student prank at the University of Oslo in 1983 and 'grew out of a subculture with general interests in Paganism and the occult' (Asprem 2008: 50). The group went on to found *Bifrost* as an umbrella organization for Asatruers in Norway and tried to achieve official acknowledgement by the Norwegian state as a religious association, following in the footsteps of the Icelanders. The attempt failed, however, and the group went on to celebrate the occasional ritual (called *blot*), but ceased its activities in 1987.

[16] For further discussion of the practice of *seid*, see below.

By the early 1990s, Asatru groups in Northern and North-western Europe as well as in the United States had established themselves as small, controversial participants within the spectrum of alternative religions. With regard to organization, they oscillated between the closed structures of occult orders and initiatory organizations, and those of more open, community-building religious groups. An international network of contacts between the most active leaders and group members was in place as well. A structural pattern which already characterized the *völkisch* religious movement in the first part of the twentieth century remains formative for the 'cultic milieu' of Asatru up until today: the frequent emergence of small groups that split as soon as they have reached a certain volume of membership, and equally frequent attempts to reunite splinter groups and form umbrella organizations. Splits occur for different reasons, most of them not ideological. Instead, they tend to be related to financial or organizational issues and motivated by competing claims to leadership. In spite of these dynamics, there is considerable continuity in the milieu as a whole. It remains organized around a limited number of active individuals; core ideas as well as points of contention remain astonishingly stable.

Asatru after 1990[17]

Nevertheless, the 1990s and 2000s brought a new quality to Asatru worldwide. Most countries saw the rise of new groups that followed a course of integration into mainstream society and aimed at different forms of official acknowledgement from the respective state authorities. They now emphasized the inclusion of original sources and academic theory and developed a new strategy for the authentication of their religion. Many groups also distanced themselves more assertively from overtly political agendas, from racism in particular. This path towards 'respectability' and desire for 'normalization' was motivated not least by the increasingly negative media attention that the racist elements in Germanic Neopaganism attracted. Books investigating the ideological and organizational right-wing connections of Germanic Neopaganism (Kaplan 1997; Schnurbein 1992; Schnurbein 1993) contributed to this attention, as did the more sensationalist press coverage. The latter was alternately concerned about neo-Nazi and Satanist tendencies in youth and religious subcultures, at times stoking veritable moral panics (Asprem 2008: 44). At the same time, Norway and Sweden in particular saw the rise of new radical racial-religious

[17] The information in this chapter follows my account in Schnurbein (2016) and is based on interviews and correspondence with the respective groups.

groups such as the *Allgermanic Heathen Front*. Both developments elicited the need for a clearer delineation of Asatruers who perceived themselves as a-racist. Last but not least, this process of change was facilitated by the technological and communications revolution of the Internet, which the new groups in particular made use of quickly and effectively in order to spread their ideas, solicit members and carry on their controversies.

Norway is the most obvious example of the emergence of new right-wing extremist, racial-religious Asatru groups coinciding with the drive for mainstream Asatru communities to 'adopt [...] an explicitly anti-racist position' (Asprem 2008: 44). In 1993, black metal musician Varg Vikernes founded the racial-religious *Norwegian Heathen Front* during his stay in prison (cf. Gardell 2003: 307). In the same year, the inactive Norwegian *Åsatrofelleskapet Bifrost* revived the idea of establishing a nationwide a-racist Asatru organization, and to resume the process of applying for official government recognition. In 1996, *Bifrost* was accepted as the first official Neopagan religious community in Norway and mainland Scandinavia. In 1998, disagreements about administrational structures and details of beliefs led to the breakaway of a small faction of *Bifrost* members, who then established *Foreningen Forn Sed* ('Association of the Old Way', *FFS*). The a-racist group continues to exist as an official religious association with a membership of approximately seventy.

With the formation of the a-racist *Sveriges Asatrosamfund* ('Swedish Asatru Association', *SAS*) in 1994, Swedish Heathens established their first successful and sustainable national organization. Controversies and problems around issues of leadership and finances caused a number of members to leave the organization around 2004 and flock to two other Asatru associations: *Nätverket Forn Sed* ('Network the Old Way'), a loosely organized network of individual *blotlag* ('ritual groups') with no central leadership, and *Nordiska Ringen* ('Nordic Ring'). The latter was founded in 2000 and changed its name to *Norröna Samfundet* ('Norse Association') in 2003 when it was officially recognized as a religious association (Gregorius 2008: 104–05, 113–15). *SAS* restabilized and achieved official recognition as a religious association in 2007. In 2009–10 its statutes and organizational structures were reworked and the name was changed to *Samfundet Forn Sed* ('Association the Old Way', *SFS*).[18] In order to gain recognition and acceptance, *SFS* has followed a similar strategy to, for example, *Bifrost* in Norway. It firmly rejects any racist or xenophobic interpretations of Norse mythology and emphasizes its democratic basis.

[18] <http://www.samfundetfornsed.se/om-samfundet-1282525> [accessed 26 February 2014].

On the other side of the political spectrum we find *Svensk Hednisk Front*, a branch of the *Allgermanic Heathen Front* which had considerable influence on nationalist movements in Sweden and Norway, not least through its publishing company *Nordiska Förlaget* and its now defunct website *Nordic Identity, Culture, and Tradition* (www.nordisk.nu; cf. Gregorius 2008: 115-17).

The development of modern Asatru in Denmark does not start until this second period with the foundation of the nationwide group *Forn Siðr* ('The Old Way' or 'Old Custom'). By 2003, it had gained official state recognition as a religious community with its own burial site and a fairly solid status within Danish society. Danish Asatru has had no controversies with overtly racial-religious groups in the country, but stormy debates about the significance of ethnicist positions within the self-professed a-racist *Forn Siðr* have shaken the milieu in recent years. The disputes motivated a number of long-term or even founding members of *Forn Siðr* to form *Nordisk Tingsfællig* ('Nordic Ting Community', *NTF*) in December, 2010.[19]

In Iceland, the death of *Ásatrúarfélagið*'s first *Allsherjargoði*, Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson, in 1993 and the activities of his successor, Jörmundur Ingi Hansen, who had previously taken care of a large part of the official media representation and international liaison, marked a shift in the history of this group. They created a burial ground and purchased a house in Reykjavík as a centre for the group. This motivated a considerable expansion, and the group made its way into mainstream society. In 2002, Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson, the well-known composer and musician, took over as *Allsherjargoði*. Since then, the group has expanded continually, and its integration into Icelandic society has been solidified. However, international relations, which Jörmundur Ingi Hansen had energetically pursued (also with members and leaders of racial-religious and ethnicist groups such as the *Armanen-Orden* and the *Odinic Rite*) were toned down, and the association worked more within its own country. With currently around 2500 registered members (in 2014), the group is still small, but in relation to the total number of Icelanders (approximately 320,000) it constitutes a considerably higher percentage of the general population than in other countries.

In spite of a temporary split of the organization in 1991, the ethnicist *Odinic Rite* developed into a well-established group and expanded internationally, forming branches in the United States, France, and Germany over the years. However, some of its members' far-right political associations and sympathies made it increasingly contentious. These controversies had reper-

[19] Cf. <http://www.nordisktingsfaellig.dk/9303/Om%20os> [accessed 9 March 2014].

cussions for the overall Neopagan community in the United Kingdom, since Pete Jennings, High Gothi of a competing Asatru group, the a-racist *Odinshof* (founded in 1987 and more strongly connected to Wicca), served as the head of the influential *Pagan Federation* for a number of years. In contrast to other countries, Heathenry in the United Kingdom is considered an integral part of the broader Neopagan scene, on a par with Wicca and Celtic groups. Asatruers are less likely to be formal members of groups in the United Kingdom and tend to practise their religion independently. They connect through mailing lists, Internet forums and gatherings organized by the general pagan community.

When the *Asatru Free Assembly* faltered in the mid-1980s, two new groups emerged and have since struggled for hegemony while developing North American Asatru into opposing ethnicist and a-racist directions: the ethnicist *Asatru Alliance* and the *The Troth* (initally called *The Ring of Troth*). Like the *Asatru Alliance*, *The Troth* serves as an umbrella under which various regional groups called kindreds, hearths, garths and hofs gather. In the formative 1990s and 2000s, *The Troth* aimed at creating a training program for clergy within Asatru and put considerable emphasis on and effort into providing knowledge about what they call 'The Lore', that is, academic and popular information about Scandinavian, German and Anglo-Saxon myth, religion, culture, folk-customs, and so forth upon which the reconstruction of a faith can be based. All of these elements have made *The Troth* a forum that many Asatruers seek out for its knowledge of sources and practices. This and the emphasis on anti-racist and non-folkish policies have contributed to *The Troth*'s considerable international influence within a-racist Asatru (cf. Kaplan 1997: 31; Gundarsson 2006: 119).

The Troth's main rival has become the *AFA* which was re-established under the new name, *Asatru Folk Assembly*, in 1994 by Stephen McNallen. He claims he was motivated by his resentment of 'signs that the politically correct faction' or 'the universalists' in Asatru were 'making inroads into territory long dominated by the folkish' (McNallen 2003–04: 210–11). Since around 2010, McNallen and the *AFA* have put considerable effort into community-building in the virtual word as well as the real, with an active homepage (<www.runestone.org>), a Facebook presence, YouTube interviews, radio programs, a blog and a podcast, and they have been able to establish themselves as an internationally active group strongly contested due to its outspoken ethnicist orientation.[20]

[20] McNallen has since left the *AFA* and is currently promoting 'The Awakening of Wotan' as the god of the Germanic race in 'The Wolf Age' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hyE-SpANKtQ> [accessed 15 August 2017].

In Germany, the direct connection to *völkisch* religion and German Faith became an increasing burden for Germanic Neopagans. Younger Asatruers started publicly distancing themselves from connections with the *Armanen-Orden* and the *ANSE* and founded three Asatru groups that each followed its own strategy in this respect. The small *Nornirs Ætt* ('Kin of the Norns') sets itself apart within the milieu through its explicit political positioning. Acknowledging that Germanic Neopaganism since the early twentieth century has been closely connected with national Romantic, *völkisch* and racist tendencies, *Nornirs Ætt* feel they have a responsibility to counteract these and to engage actively in the development of a democratic, pluralistic society. Other German Heathens tend to perceive this political positioning as a distraction from religious goals proper and consider it sufficient to follow a general 'unpolitical' policy.

Their political line sets *Nornirs Ætt* apart from another new group, the *Odinic Rite Deutschland* (*ORD*), later renamed as *Verein für germanisches Heidentum* ('Society for Germanic Paganism', *VfgH*). The *ORD* started out as a chapter of the British *Odinic Rite* in 1994, representing an ethnicist wing in German Asatru. Concerns about the mother organization's turn toward the extreme political right were voiced in *ORD*'s journal, *Ringhorn*, as early as 1995.[21] That, combined with differences in structure, ideology and practices led the *ORD* to declare its independence.

The largest and youngest of the new Asatru groups in Germany, the a-racist *Eldaring* (Old Norse *eldr* means 'fire') differs from both *Nornirs Ætt* and the *VfgH* in its conception of itself as not a tight-knit religious community but a contact and service platform — a network for Asatruers who perceive of their faith as a personal and private matter. Like the *VfgH*, it developed out of a foreign Asatru group, in this case *The Troth*, into an independent organization in 2000. According to founding members, the appeal lay in *The Troth*'s a-racist agenda and the significance it assigned to reconstructing Asatru from sources and research the *Eldaring* adapted.

Asatru International

Day-to-day, Asatru groups are primarily involved in their own affairs; most contacts and controversies between groups remain limited to their respective national context. At the same time, Germanic Neopaganism has always had an internationally active network at its disposal. Ideas and influences have been

[21] See Fritz Steinbock's editorial in *Ringhorn* 8 (1995) entitled *Ehre* ('Honour').

routinely exchanged, even though these interactions often happen through individual contacts and the majority of members might not always be aware of them.

Already the key figure for the formation of Odinism in Australia and the Anglo-American world, Alexander Rud Mills, received some of his core ideas from German *völkisch* religion. After World War II, those ideas were dispersed by Danish-born Else Christensen in the United States and taken up by the British *Odinic Rite* (*OR*), one of the groups that played a key role for the development of the international Asatru network. Throughout the 1980s, the *OR* developed a set of rituals eventually codified in the *Book of Blótar*, which was widely distributed in the Germanic Neopagan community in the 1990s. Another major contribution of the *OR* to the international Heathen community was the formulation of the 'Nine Noble Virtues', a moral code widely used by Asatru groups in English-speaking countries and beyond. The *OR* acquired its key role by admitting foreign members and, through the process of initiation, giving them a status within their own countries' Odinist and Asatru milieux. The Icelandic *Ásatrúarfélagið* had less practical but more symbolic significance for the Asatru movement. After the group's official recognition in 1973, it attracted considerable international attention. One of its founding members, the controversial head of *Nýalssinna*, Þórsteinn Guðjónsson, played a more active role in the international Asatru network. He started the English-language journal *Huginn & Muninn*, which was distributed internationally.

Already by the early 1990s an international network of racial-religious and ethnicist Asatruers had emerged, which expanded into Eastern Europe and in particular to the Lithuanian *Romuva* (Dundzila 2007) after the fall of the Iron Curtain. It acted as the taproot for the *World Congress of Ethnic Religions* (*WCER*), an international attempt to unite 'indigenous' religious groups under one roof (cf. Strmiska and Dundzila 2005: 276–78). At its official foundation in 1998, *Romuva*'s long-term leader, the ethnologist Jonas Trinkunas, became the first head of the *WCER*. The Icelandic *Ásatrúarfélagið*, Danish *Forn Siðr* and the German *GGG* were among its original members.[22] In 2010, the *WCER* changed its name to *European Congress of Ethnic Religions* (*ECER*). Its new homepage features a section where the organization now distances itself from Ariosophy as well.

The Ariosophic, occultist and rune magic branch of Asatru has had a significant impact on the internationalization of the movement beyond the *ECER* as well. Although the *Armanen-Orden* in Germany has held a lower profile pub-

[22] <http://ecer-org.eu/about/> [accessed 26 February 2014].

licly and acted more as a secret society, it had some influence on the young Stephen Flowers (alias Edred Thorsson), founder of *The (Ring of) Troth*, who attended *Armanen* gatherings in 1981–82. Thorsson brought Guido von List's and other Ariosophists' ideas and writings to the attention of an English-speaking audience (Edred 2007: 36–37). His *Rune Gild* represents an international network of select Asatruers: it currently has contact addresses in the United States, England, Germany, Finland and Australia.[23] As the author of numerous publications on runes and 'Germanic mysticism', and as the founder of a number of occultist and Heathen organizations, Stephen Flowers/Edred Thorsson has been one of the most active, outspoken and influential protagonists in the Asatru community in North America, if not worldwide. He holds a PhD in Germanic and Celtic philology from the University of Texas at Austin and started publishing popular books on Runes and Germanic magic aimed at the occult book market in the 1980s.[24] As Stephen Flowers, he continued to publish academic work (Flowers 1993) as well as translations and investigations of German Ariosophists (List 1988; Kummer 1993). Thorsson/Flowers was also a regular contributor to the journal *Tyr*, which the influential *Rune Gild* member Michael Moynihan edited together with Joshua Buckley. This journal brought ideas of German Germanic Neopaganism and the German Faith Movement to the English-speaking world (e.g., about Géza von Neményi, the *Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft* and Ludwig Fahrenkrog) (Wolff 2003–04; Neményi 2007).

Another author affiliated with *The Troth* has had significant international influence on the development of Asatru beliefs as well. Stephan Grundy (alias Kveldulf Gundarsson), *The Troth*'s academic specialist or 'Warden of the Lore', initially worked in close contact with Edred Thorsson in *The Ring of Troth* but took a different path later on. He has published a number of seminal books on Asatru (Gundarsson 1990, 1993), as well as historical fantasy with Germanic themes. His novels treating the *Nibelungen* material were widely read in German Asatru circles as well (Grundy 1994; Grundy 1996).

With the advent of the Internet, the connections within international Asatru intensified. Most of the bigger mailing lists have threads in English in addition to their respective native languages, and a number of international closed and open lists as well as online forums have formed. The Scandinavian groups, which started in the mid- to late 1990s, have traditionally been in close

[23] <http://www.rune-gild.org/contact/> [accessed 26 February 2014].

[24] For example Thorsson (1984), Thorsson (1987) and Thorsson (1989).

contact with each other, and this is facilitated by the similarities between the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish languages. Personal contacts and the existence of 'internet Heathens' enabled Germans interested in Asatru to find a forum for their interests outside of the Ariosophically tainted German scene in the 1990s.

The Problem of Ethnicity

The idea of wanting to create or revive a religion which is in accordance with national, regional or 'indigenous' culture and tradition has remained stable since Germanic Neopaganism's emergence in the early twentieth century. After 1945, this has posed a problem because Germanic Neopaganism tended to be identified with National Socialist thought. However, on the one hand it is reductionist to narrow all that is problematic with racial or ethnicist thinking to National Socialist ideology. This is equally true from the opposite perspective. Rejecting Asatru as a racist cult because of its alleged proximity to National Socialism, or explaining National Socialism through alleged Neopagan or occult origins,[25] does not hold up to scrutiny either. I therefore propose to complicate the relationship between Germanic Neopaganism and questions of race, ethnicity and right-wing extremism and give it greater historical depth. Generally speaking, the concepts of ethnicity and cultural heritage employed in Asatru hark back to National Romantic and *völkisch* traditions that seem to surface in modern Western societies on a regular basis, giving rise to the various waves of ethnification in public discourse.

As we have seen, *völkisch* religious groups and their heirs after 1945 were clearly race-based religions. The question of ethnicity has therefore been particularly controversial. The most internationally high-profile debate has raged since the 1990s between the so-called 'universalists' and the 'folkish' faction in the United States and has spread to other countries as well. It revolves around the question of who should have access to Asatru. While the folkish faction (represented by members of the *AFA* as well as the *Asatru Alliance*) maintained that Asatru is the native religion for people with 'Germanic' ancestry, and that it should remain exclusive to them, the universalists (represented by

[25] Such a thesis was most prominently advanced in 1958 by Wilfried Daim. To my knowledge, there are few scholars who have taken that route in recent years. One of them, Peter Kratz (1994), identifies the New Age movement with fascism, while the other, Karla Poewe (2006), greatly exaggerates Jakob Wilhelm Hauer and his *German Faith Movement*'s influence on Hitler and his followers.

members of *The Troth*) insist the religion should remain open for everyone drawn to it. Such a clear distinction is difficult to uphold even on an empirical level. A number of influential Asatruers have been involved in both ethnicist and a-racist groups (as I prefer to call them) without this causing any major disruption. Outspokenly folkish groups have occasionally admitted members of 'non-Germanic' heritage, while even the most inclusive universalist groups acknowledge that they do not have significantly more members with non-European backgrounds than the exclusive, folkish groups. At the same time, the distinction between ethnic and cultural criteria remains unclear. While universalist Asatruers often include ideas about ethnic specificities in their faith, folkish concepts occasionally emphasize cultural over ethnic differences. Thus, differing attitudes regarding the role of genetics, heritage and ancestry structure a diverse and contradictory spectrum of positions within and beyond Asatru. Potential associations with New Right or racial-biological essentialist ideologies are the reason why a-racist Asatru groups reject the epithet 'ethnic'. Nevertheless, the majority remains convinced that the intimate intertwining of cultural traditions with the surrounding natural world is the foundation of Asatru — a unity which is perceived as natural and immediate to people who grew up in the respective area and culture. However, it can be appropriated and learned by people with different heritages and cultural backgrounds as well.

Asatru beliefs remain characterized by a tension that is difficult to resolve. On the one hand, there is awareness of the problems connected to racial paradigms and of the fact that modern Asatru has to be based on new constructions of religion. On the other hand, there is a strong desire for wholeness and authenticity, for rootedness. Asatru religion is formed by a tension or oscillation between the search for community, which is often, but not always, conceptualized as culturally homogenous, and the desire to find an expression for one's own spiritual or esoteric preferences, a desire based on a modern liberal individualism.

The idea of an immediate connection between culture and nature is neither 'natural' nor self-explanatory. We have to understand it as a recurrence or transformation of the Romantic, Herderian idea of an organic unity of people, landscape, climate, language, history and myth. The fact that it seems self-evident to many Asatruers and that it can be used effectively as a strategy of justification also indicates that the idea is part of a broader cultural consensus. In today's globalized society, cultural essentialism and the conflation of the categories 'religion', 'culture', 'ethnicity' and 'race' thrive once again. While Asatru in many ways has moderated and reflected its own roots in and attitudes toward racial and ethnicist ideologies, the European mainstream itself has taken a turn toward culturalist or cultural essentialist thought. Both trends

are responsible for the fact that the majority of Asatruers today can no longer be found in radical right-wing environments. Asatru fashions itself as an alternative religion that sides with other allegedly suppressed religions and ethnic cultures: at the same time, it finds increasing support in mainstream ideologies, at least with regard to its views on culture and cultural roots. Heathens connect their ideas about culture, heritage and religion with the political discussions in their respective countries.

The Relation to Christianity

Another foundational idea of Germanic Neopaganism is less controversial as it carries less ideological baggage. From its inception, Germanic Neopaganism was constructed in opposition to or as an alternative to established religion, the dominant Christian churches. While a majority of followers of German *völkisch* religion in the early twentieth century adhered to a 'purified' version of Protestantism — purged of its 'Jewish', universalist and Paulinian elements, and promoting an 'Aryan Christ' — the Neopagan minority in the German Faith Movement set itself apart by combining its anti-Semitism with a pronouncedly anti-Christian stance as its guiding force and strongest motivation. Christianity appeared as an authoritarian religion detached from the world, fixated on the hereafter, promoting a bleak, unnatural gospel of sin, repentance, punishment and the need for redemption due to the inherent evil of human nature and sexuality. The 'Aryan' or 'German' religion appears as this life-negating Christianity's polar opposite: a religion celebrating (human) nature's goodness, cultivating 'a pure view of nature, an affirmation of the world, a self-confident, high-handed view of life and custom', (Wachler 1930: 16) and the possibility for, as well as the duty of, self-redemption through one's own (heroic) deeds.

Still today, anti-Christian attitudes characterize programmatic definitions of Asatru. It is consistently defined in opposition to Christianity and its alleged oversimplifying ethics of good and evil. Asatru appears as a religion of nature, based in experience and oral wisdom, as opposed to a religion in need of external revelation, blind faith, priestly authoritarian mediators and codified texts — as a system that seeks salvation (*Heil*) in this world and not in the hereafter; a faith that rates deeds higher than abstract values, abrogates the artificial division between the secular and the spiritual and rejects the central concept of original sin.[26]

[26] Kurt Oertel, 'Was ist Heidentum? Wie kann man den Begriff verstehen', Eldaring e.V. <http://www.eldaring.de/pages/germanisches-heidentum/was-ist-heidentum.php> [accessed 14 November 2011].

Nevertheless, attitudes towards Christianity vary considerably among Asatruers today, ranging from more relaxed or indifferent attitudes to a vigorous rejection of the religion as the main antagonist, or as one of the 'alien religions that do not truly speak to our souls'.[27]

Asatru Beliefs

Concrete beliefs and practices of Germanic Neopagans are rarely codified and have changed considerably over the decades but at the same time give little occasion for controversy. A closer look at Asatru beliefs shows that their reception of Old Norse material has followed the other idea-historical, literary, artistic, scholarly and popular lines of reception discussed in this volume.

The way the gods and goddesses of the Norse pantheon and other religious concepts have been understood and the religious practices such beliefs have inspired often immediately reflect the respective era's cultural theories pertaining to myth and religion. In accordance with the general attitudes of their time, adherents of a *völkisch* religion found the polytheistic nature of their ancestors' faith embarrassing: naïve at best, objectionably primitive at worst. They thus followed different strategies to prove the superior, monotheistic nature of Germanic faith. Such negative attitudes toward polytheism changed in the 1970s. All the same, the assumption that the Germanic pantheon is a natural expression of the spiritual forces that guide the Germanic or Nordic peoples, or manifests the folk- or race-soul, remained firmly in place. This racial-religious idea is reminiscent of C. G. Jung's theory of archetypes; it is no coincidence that Germanic Neopagans (as well as other Neopagan and alternative spiritual circles) still frequently refer to Jungian theories. The archetypal approach is easily combined with the idea that the gods are forces, active within nature and within humans themselves. The combination of these three aspects — cultural heritage, psychological principle and the force of nature — is still prevalent among contemporary Asatruers. Nevertheless, the reference to a Jungian paradigm has lost its dominant position since the 1990s. Increasingly, and with less obvious embarrassment, Asatruers speak about their gods as 'real and mighty beings'; as individual, independent entities with different powers and areas of responsibility; as 'good friends' one can 'relate to' and 'ha[ve] a relationship

[27] Answer to 'Why is the religion of our ancestors the best one for us?' See <http://www.runestone.org/index.php?option = com_content&view = article&id = 83&Itemid = 487> [accessed 16 September 2014].

with'; as parts of this world; and as complex, wise and powerful beings who are not omniscient (Gundarsson 2006: I, 131; GardenStone 2001: 43).

Relations and interactions between humans, gods and other (super)natural entities such as the *vættir*, dwarves, giants, elves, and so forth are theorized more or less elaborately in different countries and groups. Most Heathens refer to Eddic sources regarding Yggdrasill, the ash tree that encompasses the nine worlds (*níu heimar*) in which the different species of beings reside. Neither scholars nor Heathen practitioners agree about the nature and significance of these 'worlds' and their respective inhabitants. Frequently, the nine worlds are described as levels of individual and cosmic consciousness (cf. Jennings 1998: 26–27; Harvey 1997: 54), a concept which was initially developed by Edred Thorsson (2003: 22) in *A Book of Troth*. This concept opens up a variety of esoteric speculations about correspondences between the nine worlds, the runes and astrological signs, and so on.

The concept of the World Tree in Norse mythology in general as well as Asatru in particular is tied to the mythological figures of the three norns, Urd, Verdandi and Skuld, who, according to Eddic accounts, reside at the Urd Well at the roots of Yggdrasil. These figures, who have often been compared to the Moirae or Parcae (the Fates of Greek and Roman antiquity), give cause for much speculation and theorization about the role of fate or *wyrd* in Heathenism and the existence of an alleged characteristic *Germanischer Schicksalsglaube* ('Germanic fatalism'). Although the book *Our Troth* claims that 'there are not contradictions [with our religion] as there are in other faiths' (Gundarsson 2006: I, 523), many Heathens agree with Graham Harvey's assessment (1997: 56; cf. Gründer 2010: 210) that there is 'an ambivalence or oscillation between fatalism and free-will' within Asatru.

This notion of rootedness in the past is often set against either a 'Mediterranean' or a Christian perception of a 'linear past, present, and future' (Gundarsson 1993: 15), which by some is seen as potentially dangerous to the invoked 'roots' of Germanic faith. Such reflections on the significance of roots and ancestors show once again how easily ethnic arguments enter into the world-view of a-racist Asatruers.

The idea that Germanic Neopaganism is based on a worldly ethic of action and not on a belief in supernatural beings fuelled the debate as to whether Asatru should be considered a religious belief system, or rather a philosophical world-view and cultural tradition based on practices that should be preserved, revived and transformed. The latter position, as well as the claim that in Heathenism religious and social community are identical, is gaining ever more prominence within Asatru. This has led a number of groups to reject the term

'Asatru' and replace it with terms like *Forn Sed* or *Alte Sitte*, meaning 'the old way', 'the old tradition' or 'custom'. In doing so, they acknowledge that pre-Christian Scandinavians or Germans did not have a name for their religion, and that the term 'Asatru' is an invention of Scandinavian National Romanticism. They see the emphasis on *tru* ('belief' or 'faith') as an ultimately Christian notion which does not reflect the activist and practical nature of modern (and in their eyes also ancient) Heathenism. This increasingly common attitude explains why there is room for so many divergent ideas about deities and other supernatural beings and their relations to humans and the world. Moreover, it places ritual practices at the centre of contemporary Germanic Neopaganism.

Before we discuss those, it is worth mentioning that, in all these changes, the notion of Asatru being a 'religion of nature' has remained fairly stable.[28] The early German Faith Movement was influenced by Romantic concepts of pagan nature, earth and fertility rites. In their cultic dramas, both Ludwig Fahrenkrog and Ernst Wachler depict Norse gods, such as Baldur, as protagonists of seasonal myths.[29] Up until today, Germanic Neopagans frequently work on the assumption that polytheism, and thus paganism, is closer to nature and more conducive to ecological ideals than monotheism. In comparison, monotheism and/or Christianity are seen as inimical to both natural human drives and to the natural environment. Such ideas can be traced back to theories of Germanic or Indo-European religion as fertility cults with a more intimate relation to nature than 'desert religions', which allegedly originate in arid, infertile climates. These theories intersected with Romanticism's revaluation of nature as a metaphor for the primordial, unspoiled and pure. They were taken up positively in the primitivist neo-Romantic currents around 1900, which in turn inspired new, alternative religions. Since then, ideas about a pagan and Nordic nature spirituality have developed a remarkable productivity. They have influenced Western perceptions of nature and the natural within ecological and new spiritual movements and beyond. This is evident in the fact that many people today experience nature as a realm for spiritual, or at least uplifting, experiences. Equally widespread is the idea that Christianity or monotheism, with its mandate to 'subdue the earth', is responsible for the destruction of the natural environment, whereas paganism sees nature as animated, and thus supposedly treats it with more respect.

Over the last few decades, environmentalism and environmental spirituality have enjoyed a reputation for being progressive. Therefore, the widespread self-

[28] For a discussion of conceptions of 'nature religion', see Schnurbein (2016), ch. 6.

[29] See, for example, Wachler (1905), Fahrenkrog (1908a).

understanding of Asatru as a 'religion of nature' is much less controversial than the issues of ethnicity and concepts of religion with which it intersects. This identification with nature religion contributed to a more general acceptance of Asatru in the 1970s and 80s. Since then, Heathenism as a religion of nature has been promoted by Asatruers in order to create a self-image compatible with modern, progressive social ideals and values, such as environmentalism. At the same time, some of the underlying concepts of an animated nature and of nature spirituality are fraught with an intellectual heritage going back to Social Darwinist, racist and *völkisch* traditions. These 'soil' and 'blood' elements of nature religion were also carried over into early post-war green movements in Germany, where concepts of an indigenous Germanic or Nordic nature spirituality also played a role. Today, there is a network of groups, individuals and ideas that combine ecological engagement, ideas about the sacredness of earth and landscape and an interest in Asatru with ethno-pluralist ideas and the 'cultural' and 'landscape racisms'[30] found in New Right circles. It is in these circles that older connections with the early German Faith Movement have been revived. Such obviously ethno-pluralist, anti-democratic, racist readings of an ecological spirituality within Asatru remain controversial.

Asatru Practices

In Asatru today, ritual is seen as an aspect of religion connected to a lived reality and sense of authenticity. Most groups use the term *blot* (often spelled *blót*) for their main ritual activity, a term derived from Old Icelandic. Mostly, the purpose of the blot is to connect with the deities, to communicate with 'the powers' and, at least in case of communal blots, to strengthen the human community and group coherence. In this respect also there has been a fluctuation over time. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the communal aspect was predominant, while the 1970s and '80s saw an increasing individualization of rituals. Today, there seems to be a shift back to the emphasis on community celebrations.

We can roughly distinguish four main types of ritual: rituals of the solar cycle, rituals for other occasions (including different types of Heathen historical memorial days), individual rituals of the life cycle, and individual solitary or communal rituals to connect with deities and ask for help or advice (Jonsson 2010: 159–60). There is also a somewhat general agreement about the times

[30] The term 'landscape racism' was coined by Gerhard Hard (2001: 178). It refers to a philosophy which assigns an absolute, fateful and lasting influence of a landscape on humans, nations (*Volk*) or races. Hard traces this figure of thought directly back to *völkisch* ideology.

for the main blots. In most groups, they are held at or around the solstices and equinoxes. Scandinavian and German groups today hold most of their rituals outdoors, a practice that they perceive to be most authentic. Some groups and individuals choose to hold blots at locations that are considered pre-Christian sites of worship.

Since medieval sources are notoriously quiet about Heathen practices, elements of rites can rarely be traced back to or even considered to have been inspired by them. The only aspect from medieval sources that is included in contemporary blots is the ritual drinking and toasting. This is probably a reflection of a nineteenth-century Romantic imagination of medieval drinking rituals, which also found expression in student fraternities (Jonsson 2010: 75–82).

At the same time, Asatru rituals often resemble Wiccan practices: outdoor worship, the circle, the hallowing of the four directions and the dates for the four main seasonal celebrations. These unquestionable parallels have several possible explanations. Wicca is the largest and most influential faction within modern paganism, and has thus formed popular ideas about the general nature of pagan religions (cf. Hutton 1999). However, not all of the Wiccan-looking elements necessarily have to be attributed to a direct influence of Wicca on Asatru; rather, some may also result from their shared background in Western ritual and ceremonial magic, or even possibly from German Neopagan influences on Wicca — especially since the notion of Germanic pre-Christian religion being a seasonal religion of nature is older than the Wicca movement itself. Some early twentieth-century German Faithlers already celebrated the seasonal sun cycle and saw Eddic myths as reflections of nature and fertility, and combined these with a belief in the unity of the Germanic race with its nature.

Closely related to the question of ritual is the issue of priesthood within Germanic Neopaganism. Three main models of organization have been in place since the early twentieth century. The first is an initiatory model, which implies a Masonic system of ascending degrees. It was practised in, or propagated by, Ariosophic groups and related secret societies or lodges in the early twentieth century, and later the *Goden-Orden*, as well as the *Armanen-Orden* in Germany. Today, Edred Thorsson's *Rune Gild* follows a similar initiatory pattern, which is otherwise not very prominent in contemporary Germanic Neopaganism. The second type implies a church-like structure, with an officially appointed clergy (*Gode* or *Godi* for male, *Gydja* for female), an official religious leader comparable to a bishop (*Allsherjargoði*) and at least plans for the erection of buildings of worship (*hofs*). The third, least-structured model applies to *Samfundet Forn Sed*, Danish *Forn Siðr*, Norwegian *Bifrost*, *Foreningen Forn Sed* and the

German *Eldaring* and *VfgH*. It follows an idea formulated already in the early twentieth century by Otto Sigfrid Reuter (*Deutschgläubige Gemeinschaft*), who completely rejected a formal priesthood as well as a formalized creed or temple-buildings (cf. Puschner 2001: 252–53).

The existence of a formal priesthood notwithstanding, Asatru has another, more informal system of religious specialists: members who engage in rune magic or a neo-shamanic practice called *seid* (sometimes spelled *Sejd*, *seidh*, *seidhr* or *seiðr*). Both remain contested in Asatru and Odinism. Some see them as dishonourable, inauthentic, foreign, modern occultist or esoteric practices associated with Wicca. Others consider the study of runic or *seid* practices the core of their religious activity. Rune magic and to a lesser degree and more recently *seid* can be seen as Germanic Neopaganism's unique contributions to the modern occult and esoteric revival. They have also become popular practices outside Asatru, and thus their history, context and present status deserve particular attention here.

The roots of modern esoteric rune lore are found in Guido List's visions. He 'revealed' the runes as the sacred original language of mankind or rather of its spiritual leaders, the Aryans, and as expressions of the highest cosmic powers guiding the ancient 'Ario-Germans' (Schnurbein 1992: 92–93; Hunger 1984: 316–17). In his most influential work, *Das Geheimnis der Runen* ('The Secret of the Runes', 1908) (List 1988), List created an allegedly ancient eighteen-letter runic alphabet and assigned each rune a verse of Odin's spells in the eddic lay *Hávamál*. For List, this runic system contained the essence of Ario-Germanic wisdom. He claimed that it had been secretly transmitted through the 'dark ages' of Christianity and racial mixing via clandestine brotherhoods, medieval guilds of Masons, Templars, witchcraft and also the Icelandic skalds, who allegedly preserved the ancient German mythology, albeit in Icelandic translation. The idea that runic wisdom was concealed in various symbolic systems that could be decoded by way of his intuition allowed List to identify traces of this ancient knowledge in all kinds of later sources, be they Christian, heretic, philosophical or symbolic.

List's system fitted with common occult practices of analogical thinking and proved easily applicable to various systems of esoteric classification, such as astrology or even yoga (cf. Gorsleben 1930; Kummer 1993). Such ideas regarding the secret functions of the runes cannot easily be separated from the underlying assumption that cosmic runic energies speak only to those of 'pure Aryan blood'. If the runes were discredited as viable icons after the fall of Hitler's regime in 1945, it was not due to rune esotericists' racial theories but rather to the extensive use the National Socialist state had made of

some 'Germanic' symbols. It did not take long before an attempt was made to rehabilitate the 'Armanen' rune system and purge it of its more overt racial implications. In 1955, Karl Spiesberger (1904–92), a member of the occult order *Fraternitas Saturni*, started publishing on rune divination and rune exercises while teaching workshops using ariosophists' works as points of reference (Spiesberger 1955). He distanced himself from 'distortions of runic knowledge by race fanatics' and thought it important to separate the 'everlasting wheat grain of eternal values' from the racist chaff (Spiesberger 1955: Preface). At the same time, he carefully omitted mentioning that the racist content of rune knowledge was actually propagated by the 'masters' of esoteric runology themselves, and could not just be attributed to misuse by National Socialists.

The works by Spiesberger, List and his followers, the ariosophists Friedrich Bernhard Marby and Rudolf John Gorsleben, influenced the rune practices within the German *Armanen-Orden*. Internationally, the post-war runic revival was spearheaded mainly through the activities of Stephen Flowers/Edred Thorsson. He founded his initiatory *Rune Gild* in 1980 and launched three influential books on rune esotericism (Thorsson 1987, 1989 and 1998). Flowers/Thorsson is influenced by Spiesberger's writings (Edred 2007: 28). He denounces the abuse of runic symbolism by National Socialism and claims to offer a more historically sound take on rune divination beyond early twentieth-century German rune magic, for example, by basing his theories not on List's invented eighteen-part rune row but on the older, historically informed twenty-four-part alphabet. This, along with his academic background, convinced Heathens world-wide that his rejection of racial readings of the runes was honest and serious, and that his esoteric teachings were based on solid historical knowledge. Nevertheless, in acknowledging the help extended to him by Adolf and Sigrun Schleipfer, of the racial-religious *Armanen-Orden*, Thorsson's second book, *Runelore*, indicated that he might owe more to Ariosophy than what was initially understood (Thorsson 1987: 'Acknowledgements'). In addition to quoting academic literature in *Rune Might*, he recognizes List and Marby as significant authors on runology and goes on to present the *Armanen-Orden* as a contemporary bearer of List's runic knowledge (Thorsson 1989: 29–30). In 1988, Flowers/Thorsson published an English translation of List's *The Secret of the Runes* and thus initiated a surge of interest for Ariosophy and the 'Armanen-runes' within Asatru in the United States. Up until 2012, his publishing company Runa-Raven Press distributed his translations of other works by List, as well as by the Ariosophists Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, Siegfried Adolf Kummer and Rudolf von Sebottendorf.

The practice of *seid* has a more recent origin and arose in a different context. Neo-shamanism is closely connected to American and European leftist counter-culture, which is one reason some Germanic Neopagans regard it with suspicion. However, this did not stop several groups and individuals in the 1980s from investigating the possibilities of (re)creating a 'Nordic' or 'Germanic' form of shamanism. In reference to a (usually despised) practice of magic and divination mentioned in medieval Icelandic texts such as the sagas of the Icelanders, as well as in the Eddas, it is frequently referred to as *seid* or *seiðr*. In order to develop a modern version of *seid* from medieval sources and on the grounds of 'empirical testing', the Swedish network of shamanism, *Yggdrasil*, based their reconstructive efforts mainly on two Swedish scholars' works: Dag Strömbäck's study *Sejd* (1935) and Folke Ström's history of Norse religions, *Nordisk hedendom* ('Norse Paganism', 1967) (cf. Lindqvist 1997: 133–34). Another attempt to revive *seid* was undertaken by Flowers/Thorsson, although he combined it with runic practice as well in his book *Northern Magic* (1998). Here, he linked Norse shamanism to the genetic heritage of the Germanic peoples or 'Aryans' and suggested that Norse shamanism should be practised as an expression of an 'ancestral path' (Thorsson 1998: xii, 4). His former student and prominent *Troth* member Kveldulf Gundarsson/Stephan Grundy further developed this combination of runic and shamanic activities in the abovementioned *Teutonic Magic* (Gundarsson 1990) and popularized them through his novel *Attila's Treasure* (Grundy 1996). Finally, *Troth* member and fantasy author Diana Paxson and her group *Hrafnar* in Berkeley, California, developed a particular form of *seid*: oracular *seid*, or *spae*, in which a seidwoman or man (*völva*) go into a trance with the aid of drumming and chanting, and then answer participants' questions with the help of images they encounter in their trance.[31]

Although *seid* has established itself as an ever more important practice, its status remains ambiguous and precarious. Some perceive it as dangerous and fear-inspiring, others are suspicious because of its sexual overtones and gender-bending associations.[32] For these critics of *seid*, such 'perverse' activities appear incompatible with a Germanic world-view based on honour and heroism.

[31] This oracular *seid* has been made particularly popular by Jenny Blain, a member of *The Troth* and professor of anthropology at Sheffield Hallam University in England, who investigated her own and others' practices of *seid* as well as its basis in medieval sources in her *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic* (2002).

[32] For a comprehensive discussion of these aspects of *Seid*, cf. Schnurbein (2016), ch. 7.

Viking Warriors and Priestesses — Gender in Asatru

The wariness of *seid* as a feminine or male homosexual activity is motivated by the stereotype of Germanic religion as a cult for heroic Viking warriors. This masculinist image goes back to images of Vikings in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon Romanticism (Wawn 2000). Another variety of Germanic masculinism can be found in Lily Weiser's and Otto Höfler's accounts of alleged Germanic *Männerbünde* (Weiser 1927; Höfler 1934), initiatory all-male associations which according to early twentieth-century anthropology could be found in so-called primitive societies. According to Höfler's theory of continuity, the spirit of these 'cultic secret societies' had been at work all throughout history in political institutions of the Germanic world and was the basis for the unique state-building capacities of the Germanic race. *Männerbund* theories have been taken up again in some parts of current Asatru. But alternatives to such masculinist images are popular as well and they can also be traced back to Romantic ideas about gender systems. Jacob Grimm popularized Tacitus's assumption that women enjoyed a particularly high position within Germanic societies, especially as priestesses and seeresses (cf. Zernack 1997: 214–24). This idealizing image elicited considerable enthusiasm among nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars and Germanophiles who recognized in it their own ideal of the natural, primordial woman (Zernack 1997: 224). Jacob Grimm identified the women who were persecuted as witches in early modernity as the last representatives of these pre-Christian wise women. He thus provided another topos eagerly received and elaborated on by anti-Christian *völkisch* scholars and agitators, for whom the persecuted Germanic woman appeared as the ultimate victim of a violent, male racial Other (cf. Wiedemann 2007).

The German Faith Movement engaged with these questions of gender in controversial ways. The most pronounced *völkisch*-religious reception of theories of matriarchy can be found in the work of the Dutch-born philologist, historian and musicologist Herman Wirth (1885–1981). His *Aufgang der Menschheit* ('Rise of Mankind',[33] 1928) offered a grand imagination of an ancient Stone Age culture located in the area of today's Arctic region. This original anti-materialist, spiritual culture, from which all the world's cultural achievements were derived, originated in the Arctic-Nordic or Atlantic race. Crucial for Wirth is the assumption that women and mothers played a central role in this Aryan high religion of an All-Mother Earth led by priestesses.

[33] The title is formulated as a programmatic alternative to Oswald Spengler's culturally pessimistic *Decline of the West*.

Wirth's theories had few supporters amongst his contemporaries, but he gained recognition after World War II as the guru of an incipient Neopagan matriarchy in the 1980s (Gugenberger and Schweidlenka 1987).

Today, adoptions of elements of women-centered spirituality can be found in most Asatru groups. There is an almost unanimous, although rather vaguely formulated, consensus that women indeed held a high social position in Nordic societies, that the influence of Christianity is to blame for that high regard's demise and that contemporary Western societies' principles of equality and justice are to be attributed to the survival of such Heathen traditions (cf. Jennings 1998: 18). These opinions are rarely questioned within Asatru probably because they are also widespread in other milieux, for example, in the spiritual women's movement or in eco-spirituality, and they have found their way into idealizing (self-)perceptions of the Scandinavian countries. They have become part of a Scandinavian exceptionalism, according the North a particular tradition of equality and justice. It is thus easy to reconfigure the older stereotype of the high position of women in the pre-Christian North as a means of granting this modern exceptionalism a deep historical basis.[34]

Sources

The discussion of Asatru beliefs and practices reveals a tenuous and ambiguous relation between Germanic Neopaganism and scholarship (Schnurbein 2016: ch. 8). Today, the claim to know primary sources, as well as academic theory, plays a foundational role for the self-understanding and self-justification of a-racist and many ethnicist Asatruers. Yet the majority of these Heathens have little first-hand knowledge of these sources and the Old Norse or Latin languages that they are written in. Their knowledge comes mostly from fictional literature, Neopagan popular interpretations and other popularized accounts of Norse mythology, as well as from Internet sources. Asatruers who are able to cite sources and discuss academic theories about them are imbued with considerable symbolic capital within the Asatru community. Most importantly, though, references to scholarship have served to successfully repudiate allegations of any right-wing political involvement of Asatru.

In their conception of their beliefs, but also in their debates about the status of their primary sources, Asatruers have followed academic controversies. The

[34] Germanic Neopagan attitudes towards gender and sexuality are discussed at length in Schnurbein (2016) ch. 7.

significance Asatruers ascribe to written, folkloristic, and material sources varies widely. It ranges from the conviction that a hidden continuity of Heathen traditions once existed, which had been transmitted orally or through practices for generations, particularly in rural areas, and which simply needs to be rediscovered and revived; to the realization that the available sources are highly unreliable, and can only serve as a starting point for the creation of a new, contemporary religion. The attitudes toward different sources vary from country to country as well. This indicates that the construction of modern Asatru is closely connected to the role that Old Icelandic literature and an interest in a pre-Christian past have played in the media and institutions of the nations in question since the nineteenth century.

Generally speaking, Germanic Neopagan adaptations of scholarship are popularizations of academic approaches in the tradition of Romanticism, with which Neopagans have at times shared goals, dreams and convictions. Such approaches strongly emphasize intuition and psychology. They bear witness to the desire to activate a national spiritual rebirth by going back to ancient sources that promise to provide an untainted origin. This method and ideology goes back to German Romantic ideas of a cultural continuity, but it also appears in both the construction of a Nordic Viking Age (Hagerman 2006) and of an Anglo-Saxon past for England (Frantzen 1990; Frantzen and Niles 1997).

The unifying element among the various academic attempts to understand Germanic or Indo-European myth and religion is their use of fragmented and temporally and spatially scattered sources of evidence, with the goal of reconstructing a common pre-Christian, Germanic, Nordic or Indo-European world-view, mentality, religion or social structure. Such attempts at constructing identity academically lead to a biased selection of sources from the respective eras, and to the decontextualization of these sources from the eras in which they originated. Thus, in the case of medieval Icelandic literature, mythological texts are held in high regard and taken as expressions of an ancient Germanic essence, whereas the abundant hagiographic or Christian literature of the same era is more or less ignored as secondary and derivative. The sagas of the Icelanders serve as testimonies of a Nordic or Germanic mentality, while the large number of sagas on knights and saints, as well as those dealing with fantastic material, are considered to be dependent on Continental, courtly literature and are thus also dismissed. This type of reconstructive scholarship lends itself to the belief that combining decontextualized fragments from vastly different eras and regions can in fact lead to the identification of deep structures, of a deep past in which the origin of one's identity can be found. Such a reconstruction can then supposedly explain the present or help one's own nation or

group to regain a proper identity or essence. In other words, it is the construction of a unified, naturalized ethnic identity, which is set against a devalued 'other', most frequently 'the Jew'. It is thus not surprising that scholars critical of this ideology have concluded that the whole discourse surrounding Indo-Europeans, as well as notions of a Germanic or Nordic wholeness, ought to be considered a 'web of scientific myths' that is often allied with anti-Semitism.[35] We can conclude that both Asatru and scholarship continue to participate in a Romanticizing reconstructionism. Reconstructivist academic approaches are generally well received within Asatru contexts, with which they share a basic interest in reconstruction and religious or social renewal on the basis of ancient 'truths' or 'essences'.

Even though scholarship and Germanic Neopaganism have shaped each other and the popular imagination of Norse religion, aesthetic imaginations have played an even greater role. The first intellectuals to form the still popular images of Norse religion were not scholars but poets. The line starts with Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's and Johann Gottfried Herder's pre-Romantic searches for an aesthetic renewal of German literature and language as well as Scandinavian literary Romanticism. The line of aesthetic influences continues through Richard Wagner's immensely significant operatic rendering of the Scandinavian Nibelungen material and continues to J. R. R. Tolkien's imaginations of Middle Earth which itself is based on his knowledge of Old Norse sources and scholarship.

Aesthetic imaginaries in stories, paintings, film, and music ranging from Wagnerian opera to contemporary black metal, Viking metal, pagan metal and neofolk music have had a strong impact on Asatru as well as on popular images of Nordic myth and religion. They have even shaped academic contributions to the discourse of Nordic myth. In spite of their professed commitment to academic knowledge, many Asatruers mention fictional books as their main sources of inspiration and knowledge of Nordic religion. Furthermore, Asatruers often perceive their own religious practices as aesthetic activities. All of this can be attributed to the specific appeal of art and fiction in modernity. They are modes that bring to life the historical past, speak to the senses and allow emotional identification. Artworks can create a sense of identity and community (be it national or otherwise) which goes beyond a purely fact-oriented and intellectual level: they allow the creation of coherent worlds beyond the meagre and

[35] This is a position that has been supported by Poliakov (1974), Renfrew (1987) and Lincoln (1999). For a systematic summary and inquiry into the backgrounds of such criticism, see Arvidsson (2006).

scattered, often contradictory primary sources. This widespread popularity has turned certain aesthetic genres — popular literature and music in particular — into privileged media in Asatru's path toward respectability. They are media Asatruers themselves use to disseminate their thoughts and connect themselves with broader ideas about culture and identity. In addition, they are mainstream media that provide material for the construction of Heathen religion. At the same time, aesthetic approaches lend themselves to a more playful, individualized manner of conducting a spiritual life. Contemporary Neopagan religions in particular tend to perceive their spirituality as a creative process, and to assign art, music, literature and performance spiritual qualities.

Conclusion

Like other reconstructivist modern religions that hark back to a variety of pre-Christian myth, Germanic Neopaganism or Asatru sees a close relation between religion and culture, and has an emphatically culturalist understanding of religion. This common link unites the different factions, which of course never exist in pure forms but instead intersect in complex and often contradictory and inconsistent ways. As a general tendency we can say that while Germanic Neopaganism in the 1970s and '80s was dominated by racial-religious and ethnicist groups and the controversies between them, the racial-religious groups have been increasingly marginalized throughout the 1990s and 2000s, while the mainstream, most widely accepted and visible part of Asatru today moves in the field between ethnicist and a-racist.

A shift in mainstream discourse about the perception of religion, culture, and ethnicity has contributed to Asatru's gaining of respectability. Ideas about the intimate correlation between these entities were perceived as right-wing radical in the 1970s and '80s but have become more generally accepted after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the end of the Cold War, and even more so after September 11, 2001. This is most visible in the discourse on immigration and Islam, where culture, religion and ethnicity are conflated into one indistinguishable and immutable entity posited as an antagonist to 'our' cultural identity. Already around 1990, Etienne Balibar had argued that the exclusionary mechanisms of racist thought were not dependent on a naturalist or biological paradigm, but that a cultural essentialism had more or less replaced 'race' in public discourse. This allowed for a circumvention of the racial biological paradigm that was strongly stigmatized after 1945. In this process, 'culture' or 'cultural identity' became equally deterministic; unchangeable, essentialist foundational entities and anxieties about mixing and exchange permeate such discourses as much as

they did classical racism (Balibar 1991). This cultural or 'differentialist' racism, as Balibar calls it, has by now moved beyond the confines of the political and cultural (New) Right's ideology and entered mainstream discourse. Moreover, the central factor in this constellation is religion. Nowadays there is a general tendency to view 'culture' as a quasi-sacred entity, as well as to perceive religion as a phenomenon that is closely tied not only to 'culture' but also to specific 'cultures'. The sacralization of culture and simultaneous culturalization of religion found in both Asatru and in mainstream discourse contribute to the increased respectability of Asatru, while at the same time renewing interest in 'Germanic' or 'Nordic' religion and pre-Christian cultural heritage in high and popular culture alike.

The micro-phenomenon Germanic Neopaganism or Asatru can thus be used as a prism through which to focus on discourses and concepts that have been predominant and contested in what we call 'Western societies' since the nineteenth century, and which play a central role in the processes of a culturalization of religion and sacralization of culture. They comprise contested fields such as race and ethnicity, concepts of Christianity and religion in general and discourses developed in relation to social movements, such as ideas about nature and gender, and their relation to religion. Last but not least, they include the areas of academic thought and art and aesthetic, in which ideas about the relations between religion and culture — as well as about Nordic myth — have been systematically developed and popularized.

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Part 10

Modern Scholarship and Research as Reception

10.1 – On the Concept of 'Germanic' Religion and Myth

Julia Zernack
Translated from the German by Matthias Ammon

The subject of the present handbook — the 'Pre-Christian Religions of the North' — has traditionally also been referred to as 'Germanic religion' (sometimes 'religion of the Teutons', 'Germanic paganism'), 'Germanic mythology' or 'Germanic religion and myth'. These composite terms pose terminological issues, not least because they make reference to the decidedly ill-defined and moreover ideologically weighted concept of 'Germanic', which has more or less lost its scholarly value as an analytical category. Nevertheless, the term 'Germanic religion' remains in use, particularly in Germanophone scholarship. The history of Germanic religion is a core part of the study of Germanic antiquity (*Germanische Altertumskunde*), a branch of scholarship which is likewise primarily based in German-speaking countries. The term is common in several variants, such as *altgermanische Religions* (*geschichte*) ('[the history of] ancient Germanic religion'), as in Jan de Vries's 'classic' study which has long been considered the standard work on the subject (de Vries 1935–37, 2nd edn 1956–57; for the quotation, see Ström and Biezais 1975: 11; see also Meyer 1910; Helm 1913–53; Clemen 1934), *Religion der Germanen* ('religion of the Germanic peoples', Maier 2003), *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen* ('religion and mythology of the Germanic peoples', Simek 2003) or *Religion und Kult der Germanen* ('religion and cult of the Germanic peoples', Rubel 2016). The concept of 'Germanic religion' is not completely unknown in other

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academic languages, but the relevant studies refrain from assuming the comprehensive perspective implied by the term 'Germanic' when they in fact only discuss the myth and religion of Northern Europe (e.g., Turville-Petre 1964; also Böldl 2013), Anglo-Saxon paganism (e.g., Stanley 2000; Wilson 1992) or Old Norse religion (Steinsland 2005) respectively, though Ewing (2008) provides a counter-example. The terms used are rarely identical in meaning; there is no internationally consistent nomenclature for the manifold historical manifestations of pre-Christian religions in Northern Europe.

This lack of definition, which the unsystematic use of the formula 'Germanic religion' and all its variants might imply, applies to each of the terms individually and in combination: they are based on scholarly preconceptions, many of which are considered at least frivolous today. Those preconceptions not only include the idea of an inner unity of Germanic religion, but extend to a far-reaching assumption of cultural continuity which was one of the reasons for the ideological abuse of the term 'Germanic' in the twentieth century (von See 1994). Generally speaking, serious scholars of Germanic religion today distance themselves from its outdated interpretation (Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §§41, 45; Maier 2003: 6–21; Pohl 2004a, 78–85; Rubel 2016: 9–13) and emphasize that *ein für alle* [*als germanisch geltenden*] *Gruppen und Stämme gemeinsames Religionssystem* ('a religious system common to all communities and tribes [considered to be Germanic]') cannot be presumed (Hultgård 2003: 432; see also Hasenfratz 1992: 12; Böldl 2013: 13). Since the term continues to be used nevertheless, it is now only suitable as a conventional collective name for a multitude of temporally and geographically distinct phenomena which can be attributed to speakers of a Germanic language. According to more recent views, then, the term 'Germanic religion' does not denote a unified entity of whatever kind and is therefore characterized by an inner tension between its historical usage and the critical engagement with precisely this usage.

In order to investigate this tension it is necessary to reconsider aspects of the history of the concept and of the history of scholarship associated with the term. These will be discussed separately here, even though they are interwoven in multiple ways. In discussing the history of the concept, the terms 'Germanic', 'religion' and 'mythology' will be examined individually, in combination ('Germanic religion', 'Germanic religion and mythology') and in their distinctiveness from each other ('religion' versus 'mythology'). With regard to the history of scholarship, it will be necessary to discuss issues of interdisciplinarity and, closely connected to these, the question of how scholarship reacts to the dearth of sources that is characteristic of Germanic religion and which requires a decision about what can even be considered a 'source' in this context.

This discussion is not intended as a systematic review of the history of scholarship (but see on this de Vries 1956–57: 1, §§34–61; Seipp 1968; Ström and Biezais 1975: 28–36; Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §§41 and 43).

The Concepts 'Germanic Religion', 'Germanic Myth' and the History of Scholarship

None of the relevant terms derive directly from the context of Germanic religion. 'Germanic' is a modern coinage which is based on the foreign appellation *Germani* as used by Caesar and Tacitus but does not have the same meaning. In the early nineteenth century, 'Germanic' was used in comparative linguistics to describe a group of historically attested languages whose features (in particular the so-called Germanic sound shift) indicate that they are genetically related. Apart from the Germanic languages as a whole, linguistics likewise refers to the reconstructed proto-language out of which these languages are meant to have developed as 'Germanic' (*urgermanisch* or 'proto-Germanic'). Originally, the term 'Germanic' therefore had a purely linguistic meaning and was used as such, for instance, by the Danish linguist Rasmus Kristian Rask (1787–1832). However, under the influence of the Romantic idea of the *Volksgeist* ('national spirit') it became equated with the classical term *Germani* and was reinterpreted as a timeless ethnic concept on the basis of the emphatic and ahistorical idea of 'the Germanic' of the early modern period (see Chapter 3.5 above; von See 1970 and 1994; Beck 1986a; Springer 1990; Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §1h; Pohl 2004b; Jarnut 2004 and 2012). Now the Germanic-speaking peoples were considered to be one *Volk* for which Germanic identity has been assumed as a common system of cultural values, which remains valid across many centuries up until the present time and which by far exceeds the linguistic commonalities. The terminology is also inconsistent in this context. Often, any cultural aspects common — or assumed to be common — to the historical communities (or 'tribes') considered to be Germanic are called 'Germanic' or 'common Germanic' (*gemeingermanisch*), as in the passage from Baetke (1938) cited below. However, the Germanicist Andreas Heusler (1865–1940), for instance, attempted to introduce the term *altgermanisch* ('ancient Germanic') in order to clarify the terminology. He described it as a consciously dehistoricized term of cultural typology (Heusler 1923: 8) intended to facilitate the connection of temporally and geographically disparate features so that the assumed common cultural substance — the 'Germanicity' — becomes visible (see Zernack 2005a; also Beck 1986b).

The scholarly deconstruction of these concepts started to get off the ground slowly only in the second half of the twentieth century (see, e.g., Wenskus 1961; von See 1970; *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* (1975 and 1981); Beck 1986a; Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998, §1h; Beck 2004; Pohl 2004b; Jarnut 2004 and 2012). These older interpretations are now considered untenable in the relevant subdisciplines, particularly also because there is no evidence that the historical communities which were deemed to be Germanic had any notion of a common origin, an ethnic self-conception or any other kind of feeling of a common bond. Outside of the scholarly discourse essentialist — in particular ethnic — conceptions of Germanicity are still extant. For instance, they are the basis for the multiple forms of recent Germanic Neopaganism (von Schnurbein 2016: 5–8, 123–45 and Chapter 9.2 above).

The term 'religion' is ambiguous and difficult to define in the first place (Kehrer 1998). It confers on the spiritual customs of the historical communities subsumed under the name 'Germanic' a structure that has been shaped by religions of a different type, in particular Christianity. The use of the term thus tends from the outset to obstruct the view of the specificities of the spiritual customs under discussion (Hultgård 2003: §1), such as their variety and heterogeneity. 'Religion' is not an appropriate term to describe these characteristics because it presupposes an integrative structure superimposed on the local cults, as is characteristic of the supranational religions of the book (Hultgård 2003: §2). The same caveat has similarly been expressed with regard to related terms such as 'Old Norse religion' (see Brink 2007; Schjødt 2009).

The term 'religion' only appears late in the history of scholarship on Germanic religion. In the nineteenth century the term 'mythology', which stems from classical culture, is frequently used instead. Thus the title of the first scholarly and systematic study of the topic, Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* ('German Mythology') from 1835, already refers to precisely that concept which in the twentieth century is called 'Germanic religion'. Grimm calls it 'mythology' because he assumes that the beliefs of preliterate peoples find proper expression in their mythology (Grimm 1992 [1875–78]: I, p. vi [preface to the 2nd edn of 1844]). When, in addition to philology, archaeology and history also became interested in the faith of the Germanic peoples at the end of the nineteenth century, the term 'religion' was increasingly used to describe historically documented forms of spiritual practices, such as cults, whereas 'mythology' becomes associated with poetry. This terminological development is evidenced by the composite term 'religion and mythology of the Germanic people', in which 'religion' and 'mythology' appear as complementary categories.

Both basic terms in the collocation 'Germanic religion', which has become dominant since the beginning of the twentieth century, independently and in different ways make a claim for the homogeneity of the concepts they respectively denote: one in the sense of the Romantic idea of the *Volk*, the other according to the paradigm of the large religions of the book. In their combination they reinforce each other and express the assumption that their joint concept is a monolithic phenomenon for which continuity can be presumed from the Bronze Age or even earlier eras up to the Christianization of the Germanic peoples. However, this idea rests on debatable assumptions, such as the view that a number of large tribal communities which (at least originally) consisted of speakers of Germanic languages could be considered as one people, for which in analogy with shared language a common faith could be assumed that remained unchanged over centuries and which could be adequately described by the Christian concept of 'religion' with all its theological implications. By employing this terminology, scholarship asserts the existence of a historical phenomenon, finding evidence of which poses *eine ungeheure Problematik* ('immense problems'), as the historian of religion Karl Helm (1925: 2) aptly put it.

Methodological Issues

At first glance, however, the inherited terminology promised a great methodological advantage with regard to the often-lamented paucity of sources for Germanic religion. The assumption of ontological unity for the 'Germanic' — whether as a people or a culture — for a long time allowed scholars to relate the often not very meaningful, fragmentary, and geographically, temporally and typologically extremely heterogeneous pieces of evidence to each other as 'Germanic findings' (Pohl 2004b: 21) or indeed to eliminate blank spots in the surviving evidence by projecting findings about the 'Germanic people' (considered as a unity) onto individual 'tribes' and vice versa (Jarnut 2004: 111–12). This is declared programmatically for instance by Walter Baetke (1938: vii) with regard to Germanic religion:

> Wir dürfen auch die innere Einheitlichkeit des germanischen Geisteslebens (ebenso wie der Sprache) historisch für genügend erwiesen halten, um sie der Betrachtung seiner einzelnen Erscheinungen zugrunde zu legen. Gewiß gab es Volks- und Stammesunterschiede, von solchen wußte schon Tacitus, und es gab natürlich auch eine geschichtliche Entwicklung. Trotz allem aber bestand — bis zum Eindringen der christlichen Kultur — eine Gemeinsamkeit, die über Zeit und Raum hinweg-

> reichte und auf jedem Gebiet der Kultur sich geltend machte; es ist dies eben das, was wir als das ‚Gemeingermanische' bezeichnen. Darauf beruht die Berechtigung des Versuchs, auch die germanische Religion der vorchristlichen Zeit als Einheit zu schauen. Das ist bei dem trümmerhaften Zustand der Überlieferung nicht leicht, aber es wird doch ermöglicht durch zum Teil überraschende Übereinstimmungen, die von den Runeninschriften bis zur Edda, von Tacitus bis zu Snorri reichen.
>
> (We may assume the inner unity of the Germanic mental life (as of language) to be sufficiently proven historically to take it as the basis for the examination of its individual phenomena. Of course there were differences between peoples and tribes, as Tacitus already knew, and naturally there was a development over time. Nevertheless, until the intrusion of Christian culture there existed a commonality which stretched across space and time and asserted itself in every aspect of culture; this is precisely what we mean by 'common Germanic'. This is the basis for the justification to likewise view the Germanic religion of the pre-Christian era as a unity. This is not an easy task due to the extremely fragmentary nature of the evidence, but it is made possible by the often surprising amount of consistency between sources ranging from runic inscriptions to the Edda, from Tacitus to Snorri.)

Essentially this methodology is already anticipated by classical authors. Tacitus and Caesar claim validity for their statements for the entirety of the *Germani* even though they only have at best partial knowledge of the Germanic way of life (Springer 1990: 171).

In the modern period, it is the method of comparative reconstruction which is meant to enable scholarship to wrest a holistic view of Germanic religion from the sparse evidence. This method was introduced by Jacob Grimm in his aforementioned study of Germanic religion *Deutsche Mythologie*. This work was a formative piece for many aspects in the development of scholarship on the history of Germanic religion, including in its patriotic slant (see Chapters 2.1 and 3.5 above). In terms of methodology, the study oriented itself along the lines of the new (at the time) field of comparative linguistics which makes older unattested linguistic features accessible through the systematic comparison of attested language forms. Similarly, Grimm's interest was focused on an unattested subject — the beliefs of the Continental Germanic tribes — which he wished to make accessible by comparison and reconstruction of their mythology, in analogy to the lost linguistic structures:

> gelten [...] in der sprache schlüsse auf das was abhanden ist, zuckt ihre gegenwärtige beschaffenheit noch weit zurück in die ältere und älteste: so muss auch in der mythologie ein ähnliches verfahren sich rechtfertigen und aus ihrem versiegenden wasser die quelle, aus den stehngebliebnen sümpfen der alte strom geahnt werden. (Grimm 1992 [1835]: vi; see also xvii)

> (Now if such inferences as to what is non-extant are valid in language, if its present condition carries us far back to an older and oldest; a like proceeding must be justifiable in mythology too, and from its dry watercourses we may guess the copious spring, from its stagnant swamps the ancient river.) (Feldman and Richardson 1972, 411; based on the English translation by Stallybrass 1966 [1883–88])

In addition to the comparative-reconstructive method Grimm also established the corpus of written sources which has since then formed the basis of the study of Germanic religion: disparate, fragmented pieces of evidence which he interpreted with the help of the rich Icelandic mythological tradition which was recorded long after the country's Christianization. He also extracted information about lost religious ideas from the linguistic evidence itself, personal and place names, formulas and idioms, as well as from the legal tradition. Due to the lack of direct sources, Grimm also made use of post-medieval folktales (such as fairy tales) and customs, under the assumption that the latter in particular existed in his own day in unbroken continuity from ancient times (Grimm 1992 [1875–78]: I, p. ix).

One of Jacob Grimm's most momentous methodological decisions was to employ high medieval Icelandic sources for the reconstruction of late antique and early medieval conditions in Continental Europe. He explicitly claims that he does not want to be led by the Icelandic sources in order not to blur the peculiarity of the 'Old German' — that is, the Continental Germanic — mythological system (Grimm 1992 [1875–78]: I, p. vii). However, he rarely refrains from using the Nordic material for the derivation of explanations and interpretations of his 'poorer' findings (Grimm 1992 [1875–78]: I, p. viii; see de Vries 1956–57: I, §36). Beate Kellner has shown this in detail for his treatment of the god Wodan/Odin (Kellner 1994). Grimm saw this approach as justified because he was convinced that the tribes which he considered to be Germanic had originally possessed a uniform mythology. Even though this form of recourse to Old Norse mythology is for the most part criticized today, it has not totally disappeared from the history of Germanic religion. This method is still used in the interpretation of archaeological finds and in particular in scholarship on iconography, such as that on bracteates (e.g., Ellmers 1992: 110–12; Hedeager 1996 and 2001; Heizmann 2012: 699–702), not to mention the widespread uncritical equation of Germanic and Norse mythology. Grimm's practice of discerning traces of ancient ideas about religion in folklore, which had likewise been influential for a long time, is rather more discredited today (Kramer 1992; Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §54).

Jacob Grimm's genetic-reconstructive method of interpretation has been used as a model up to and beyond the middle of the twentieth century. This

method is deductive insofar as it presupposes the existence of an overarching quantity onto which all individual findings can be projected. For Grimm and many of his successors — such as the Vienna School of Rudolf Much (1862–1936) with its perhaps most famous and probably most controversial representative Otto Höfler (1901–88) — this quantity is that of the 'Germanic'. For other scholars, its place is taken by other categories of interpretation, such as the ethnological aspect of 'primitive' religion for the British ethnologist of religion Sir James Frazer (*The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890; third extended edition 1906–1915) and the Danish historian of religion Vilhelm Grønbech (*Vor folkeæt i oldtiden* (1909–12), literally 'Our tribe in antiquity', English translation as *The Culture of the Teutons* (1931)), or the social structure of the ancient Indo-Europeans in the so-called trifunctional hypothesis by the influential French sociologist Georges Dumézil (e.g., *Mythes et dieux des Germains* (1939); second revised edition with the title *Les dieux des Germains* (1959), English translation as *Gods of the Ancient Northmen* (1973)).

Interdisciplinary Problems

In Jacob Grimm's time the study of the history and culture of the Germanic peoples was the preserve of philology. However, when more and more archaeological material became available towards the end of the nineteenth century, these foundations developed into an interdisciplinary research area that came to be called *germanische Altertumskunde* ('the study of Germanic antiquity') in the style of *klassische Altertumswissenschaft* ('the study of classical antiquity' or classics) (Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §§55–58). Apart from philology and archaeology, history, legal history and the history of religions also contributed to the new field. This collaborative endeavour promised new possibilities for the reconstruction of the Germanic past and Germanic religion. On the one hand, it opened up the opportunity to assign a material as well as a spiritual culture to those speakers of Germanic languages that are known from philology. On the other, archaeological finds reach back much further than all other sources. Both of these aspects brought new methodological challenges which, however, were not initially recognized. These issues are described systematically only in the second half of the twentieth century — particularly in the context of the second edition of the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* (Beck et al. 1973–2007; see also Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998) — and are primarily the result of the uncritical connection of findings from the individual disciplines. Their respective insights are usually already reconstructions in themselves and as such are based on different methodological assumptions which would need

to be taken into account in each individual case (see, e.g., Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §1h).

One of the most important aspects to consider here is that the respective research areas differ strongly from one another, particularly with regard to their idea of the 'Germanic'. There is still no general interdisciplinary definition of the term. This has been recognized as a significant problem since a time of 'crisis' in the study of Germanic antiquity in the 1970s (see Wenskus 1986: 2 for the use of the term 'crisis' (*Krise*); Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §1h, 15, 34, 50). Up until that point, the Romantic ideology of the national character (*Volksgeist*) hid the fact that the field's very research subject in the sense of a 'Germanic' culture that encompassed all areas of life could only exist if scholarship compared things that were not comparable. This is evidenced in exemplary fashion by the attempts to combine the approaches used by Germanic philology and archaeology respectively.

Like all disciplines, these two research areas have their own groups of sources that require different specific methodologies of investigation, the analysis of which leads to different specific results. Philology studies linguistic sources in the broadest sense, such as written sources, names and language structures. Dating and localizing these securely is often difficult if not impossible. Written sources are also comparatively recent and stem from a time post-Christianization. While the linguistic material for Germanic history (and likewise Germanic religion) exists in a fixed corpus that has been known to scholars for a long time and has been analysed many times, archaeological finds increase at a great rate. It is usually possible to assign a specific location and date to these finds, and while written sources can be mined for spiritual concepts with the appropriate critical distance, archaeological material requires contextualization precisely with the help of written evidence. Particularly when archaeologists try to interrogate their finds — such as burial places, burial objects, cultic spaces, cultic objects, images or similar — for information about religious beliefs, they necessarily have to rely on written sources which are later and post-conversion (Ellmers 1992). In current academic practice it is fundamentally problematic to connect archaeological finds too closely with written evidence, to say nothing of the assignment of 'cultures' which have been documented archaeologically to the names of tribes or peoples attested in written sources or even to ethnic groups (Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §20A; Brather 2012). It is therefore questionable to what extent philological insights can be verified on the basis of archaeological finds and vice versa. This caveat holds true for interdisciplinary collaboration within the study of Germanic antiquity generally (Beck, Steuer and Timpe 1998: §58).

The consideration of interdisciplinarity in research on 'Germanic' topics therefore shows that the comparative reconstruction method throws up problems which are far more complex than Jacob Grimm could have assumed. This is not only due to the fact that the different disciplines developed in very different directions over the course of the twentieth century while at the same time losing an integrative terminology and concept of the Germanic. Sources of very different character and very different provenance, which had been the domain of each specific discipline and its respective specific methodologies, were brought together in comparison with each other in order to 'regain' lost cultural conditions. If this approach is already methodologically questionable in itself, it furthermore carries the danger that historical speech communities will be improperly identified with religious, political, social or ethnic groups, particularly against the background of an ontological idea of the Germanic.

Consequences

The claim of the study of Germanic antiquity to enable a kind of *Totalanschauung* ('holistic view') (Beck 2012:64) of Germanic culture through the cooperation of several academic disciplines contains a considerable potential for irrationality which unfolds particularly in the scholarship on the history of Germanic religion. Until far into the twentieth century, this field of research's primary endeavour was to consider the pre-Christian faith of those peoples considered Germanic under the aspects of uniformity, wholeness and continuity. For a long time, critical voices were finding it difficult to be heard, among them the previously mentioned Karl Helm who undertook a study of Germanic religion in 1913 with the title *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* ('History of Ancient Germanic Religion') which was influenced by the theory of evolution. He departed decisively from the idea that Germanic religion was uniform; instead, he divided his material into two periods — the prehistoric, pre-Roman and Roman period in Volume I (1913), the post-Roman period in Volume II (1937–53) — and split it geographically by discussing the religious beliefs of the East and West Germanic tribes separately (a volume about the religion of the North Germanic peoples was never finished).

At first, Helm found a follower in the Dutch historian of religion Jan de Vries, who used a similar concept in the first edition of his German-language work *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (1935–37). However, in the second, fully revised edition (1956–57), de Vries returned to the older approach under the influence of Dumézil's Indo-European hypothesis (see further Chapter

10.3 below). His aim now was to look at *die Einheit und Einheitlichkeit des germanischen Glaubens trotz seiner nach Ort und Zeit gegebenen Zersplitterung* ('the unity and uniformity of Germanic religion despite its temporal and geographical fragmentation') with a *Gesamtschau* ('holistic view') and to explain it as the *Fortsetzung und Weiterentwicklung indogermanischer Religionsformen* ('continuation and development of Indo-European forms of religion') (de Vries 1956–57: I, 9, 11).

De Vries thus shifts close to a line of interpretation established — at nearly the same time as the first volume of Helm's *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* — by the Dane Vilhelm Grønbech in his expansive four-volume synthesis of Germanic culture (*Vor folkeæt i oldtiden*; see Heinrich Beck's preface in Grønbech 2002 [1937–39]: 5–14). In the wake of its translations into English (*The Culture of the Teutons*, 1931) and German (*Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, 1937–39) this book has been influential beyond Denmark since the 1930s. In Grønbech's understanding the Germanic peoples represent an idealized type of 'primitive' culture which can be primarily understood through its religion. Religion is seen as the expression of the Germanic people's relationship with the world, which Grønbech considered as a whole to be grounded in religion.

In the middle of the twentieth century this approach was followed by the Germanicist and folklorist Otto Höfler from Vienna. He turned the attempt to prove that the overall order of life (*Gesamt-Lebensordnung*) of the Germanic peoples was *an das Sakrale gebunden* ('tied to the sacred') into his life's mission (quotations from Höfler's introduction to Dumézil 1959: xiii–xiv; see also Höfler 1937) and did not shy away from claiming the continuity of this way of life up to his own time. His teachings about cultic *Männerbünde* ('Fraternities') and *Kriegerweihe* ('Consecration of Warriors'), about the religious foundations of the law and the sacred legitimization of rulership among the Germanic peoples, were convenient justifications for several aspects of Nazi ideology. Otto Höfler's work, with its characteristic exaggeration of the importance of religion, is mentioned here as an example of the self-subjugation of Germanic scholarship to *völkisch*-nationalistic and National Socialistic ideologies (see Zernack 2005b and 2008, with further references). Besides its tendencies towards ideas of wholeness and continuity, it also shows an inclination — common at the time — towards an uncritical use of sources which denies their mediality as well as the fictional character of the textual witnesses, projects different types of sources onto each other without reflection and is far too prepared to accept arguments from analogy and to generalize subjective interpretations.

The Need for New Terminology

It is a strangely unresolved question as to why the term 'Germanic' is still in use, given that it is ideologically compromised, often regarded as removed from the sources and useful as an analytical tool only in a very limited way (Jarnut 2004; Steuer 2012: 107). It is likewise unclear why some areas of scholarship cling to the much-criticized term 'Germanic religion' (and its variants) even when they distance themselves from the problematic concepts for which the term was originally coined. The study of Germanic antiquity has long become the study of the antiquity of Central and Northern Europe, a field that uses its sources inductively and accepts that a past that is only attested in fragments cannot be reconstructed in a holistic way. In principle, it therefore follows a regionalist approach — even if not always and everywhere — and for instance investigates the surviving sources for pre-Christian beliefs in particular regions without deeming it necessary to connect such ideas *a priori* with historical — or indeed contemporary — ethnic communities. Appropriate terms for such an approach are available to scholarship, such as the plural form 'pre-Christian religions of the North'.

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10.2 – Philological Studies of the Pre-Christian Religions of the North from Árni Magnússon to the Present

Annette Lassen

Philology is a broad scientific concept, its etymology indicating a 'fondness for language and discourse'.[1] In antiquity the term covered everything from interest in serious discussion to formal scholarship. During the Renaissance, the term referred to the study of classical antiquity or *antiquitates* ('antiquities') in the plural, that is, Greek and Roman history and philosophy. In the nineteenth century, the Golden Age of philology, the term came to include the study of Germanic, Indian and Persian languages and literatures, while also incorporating archaeology and folklore. Later in the same century, however, the meaning began to be narrowed down to mean the study of the historical development of languages and the discipline of textual criticism. Almost everything written by scholars about Nordic religion in the nineteenth century could thus, strictly speaking, be regarded as philological in the broad sense.

The present survey focuses primarily on studies of written sources conducted by scholars who edited Old Norse texts. The study of Nordic religion based on folkloristic methods or Indo-European studies in the nineteenth century is treated in Part 3 above. Philological studies of Nordic religion from their beginning at the end of the seventeenth century can be said to have been

[1] The word is a Greek compound from *philo-* ('fondess, affection') and *logos* ('speech, story, word, language, reason').

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inspired by textual criticism in its many forms. The underlying notion seems to have been that Nordic religion could be described and understood through the methods of textual criticism, given that we do not have access to Old Norse myths in their original form or forms. The majority of Old Norse texts do not exist as autograph originals. Only copies and copies of copies have been transmitted, the originals having been potentially altered to such an extent that they are strictly speaking unrecoverable. Since the trustworthiness of manuscripts is dubious, scholars' pursuit of original myths through textual means is questionable. The traditional work of textual criticism is to produce a text as close as possible to the original (Maas 1958: 1), and, at least until a certain point in the twentieth century, many philologists can be said to have approached the study of Nordic religion in a similar way, that is, by evaluating the trustworthiness of the different written sources. Many, but not all, philological studies of Nordic religion can be viewed as attempts to establish a new and improved basis for further studies in the field.

Árni Magnússon (1663–1730)

The great manuscript collector Árni Magnússon was an early pioneer of philological studies and investigated some of the most important sources of Nordic religion. Even though his study of Sæmundr fróði 'the Wise' Sigfússon, *Vita Sæmundi multiscii*, does not impinge directly on Nordic religion, the work is nonetheless important as an early example of source criticism. Árni Magnússon wrote his work on Sæmundr around 1690 (Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 140), some twenty-five years after P. H. Resen published his *Edda Islandorum* (cf. Volume 1 of this study, Chapters 3.1 and 3.2). In Árni Magnússon's time, scholars tended to take the written sources at face value and would, without much hesitation or criticism, seek what they believed to be historical facts in legendary sagas, kings' sagas as well as in folk-tales. Árni Magnússon's work on Sæmundr fróði can be viewed as a methodological break with seventeenth-century scholarship (Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 137).

Árni's *Vita Sæmundi multiscii* ('Life of Sæmundr the Very Learned') was not published until 1787, long after his death in 1730, as part of the introduction to the first volume of the Arnamagnæan edition of the eddic poems (*Edda* 1787–1828). In this short essay he criticizes earlier scholars, such as Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá, Guðmundur Andrésson and Brynjólfur Sveinsson, and puts to rest the idea that Sæmundr fróði collected or wrote the Poetic Edda, as scholars believed in the seventeenth century (Árni Magnússon 2008: 151–52; see also Lassen 2013). He also rejects Runólfur Jónsson's and Guðmundur

Andrésson's thesis that the eddic poems date from before the burning of Troy. Árni argues that the authors of the poems did not themselves believe that the poems originated with the Norse gods, the Æsir — even though they composed them as if they were the gods' direct speech. According to Árni Magnússon, the authors of the eddic poems would have considered the poems as the *matière* of ancient times and used them as confirmation of the fables of the skalds (Árni Magnússon 2008: 154) — which is, indeed, what Snorri Sturluson does in his *Edda*. Árni argued furthermore that the fact that the heathen gods speak in the first person in some of the poems does not mean that they are the authors of these poems (thus scholars had believed that Óðinn was the author of *Hávamál*, cf. Volume 1, Chapter 2.2.1; Árni Magnússon 2008: 154). Árni Magnússon suggests that the poems containing utterances in the first person are composed by authors at a much later stage in time and hatched in the personae of the gods. He also notes, in connection with the dating of the eddic poems as contemporary with the supposed historical events they relate, that Snorri Sturluson and P. H. Resen seem to be in general agreement with one another, since Snorri states that the giantesses Fenja and Menja composed the eddic poem *Grottasöngr*, which on closer examination, according to Árni, turns out to have been written after King Fróði's time (Árni Magnússon 2008: 154). Árni is thus able to conclude, in accordance with Thomas Bartholin (1689: 192), that the poems were composed by pagan worshippers in honour of their gods, and not by the gods — or the Asians — themselves. He argues furthermore that the eddic poems actually date from different periods, were composed by different skalds and written down from memory or oral delivery after Christianity brought Latin letters to Iceland by someone who had a great interest in antiquities (Árni Magnússon 2008: 157).

Árni Magnússon's work on Sæmundr was, as mentioned above, not published until 1787, almost a century after it was written, which meant that the response to his conclusions was deferred. Nonetheless, his study marked a turning point in the discussion of eddic poetry. The belated publication of Árni Magnússon's work almost coincided with the appearance of an immensely influential work by the German scholar Johann Gottfried Herder (1796), who argued that, unlike Greco-Roman mythology (and consequently Christianity), Nordic mythology was *einheimisch* ('local') to the Germanic people (cf. Volume 1, Chapter 5.1). Following Herder, all mythologies could be considered regional phenomena. Árni Magnússon's study, which came out only a few years before Herder's, had moved the eddic poems both forward in time and toward the North, compared to earlier discussions. His critique of the euhemeristic readings of these poems, moreover, pointed ahead in time to the Romantic period, when myths were no

longer rationalized and historicized but regarded as expressions of the omnipotent *Weltseele* ('World Soul') (Halink 2017).

Finnur Magnússon and Runamo

For a long time after the publication of Árni Magnússon's *Vita Sæmundi multiscii*, the methods of source criticism made little progress, and, as a consequence, there were limited results within the field. One of the most influential scholars of Nordic religion in the nineteenth century was Professor Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847) of the University of Copenhagen, renowned for not being a source critic. He contributed to the Arnamagnæan edition of the eddic poems (*Edda* 1787–1828), published Danish translations of them (1821–23) and, most importantly, in 1824–26 he published an extremely influential work, *Eddalæren* ('The Teaching of the Edda') in four volumes inspired by the comparative linguistics of his friend Rasmus Kristian Rask (1787–1832). In this work Finnur Magnússon gave the final death-blow to euhemerism (N. M. Petersen 1849: 39; see the discussion in Chapter 3.3).

The focus of the present discussion, however, is on Finnur's infamous study of the 'runes' at Runamo in Blekinge (now in southern Sweden), *Runamo og Runerne* ('Runamo and the Runes'), which was published in Copenhagen in 1841. In this philological study Finnur Magnússon claimed to have deciphered an important (and new) source on Old Norse religion and ritual. Saxo Grammaticus in the *Præfatio* to his *Gesta Danorum* (*Saxo* 2015: I, Pr. 2.5, pp. 12–13) had told of an unsuccessful expedition to the Runamo cliff at the request of King Valdemar the Great to decipher signs which were held to be runes. In the seventh book (*Saxo* 2015: I, vii. 10.3, pp. 514–15), Saxo then informs the reader that the runes were engraved in commemoration of the father of Haraldr hilditönn ('Wartooth'). In 1640, some 450 years later, another attempt was made by Jonas Skonvig (*c.* 1600–64) at the request of Ole Worm (1588–1655) in connection with the publication of his *Danicorum Monumentorum libri sex* ('Six Books of Danish Monuments') (1643). Skonvig claimed to have been able to read the word *lund* at Runamo. Again about eighty years later, when the area had become Swedish territory, Erik Julius Biörner (1696–1750) visited the cliff and claimed to have been able to read the name *Harald*. Scholars continued to travel to Runamo to attempt to decipher the signs, including the Danish historian Jacob Langebek (1710–75), who took along the painter Søren Abildgaard (1718–91) in 1753 or 1754. Though some scholars claimed the signs were natural markings in the rock face, their decipherment continued to be a respected endeavour (Finnur Magnússon 1841).

In connection with work on a new commentary on Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, Bishop P. E. Müller requested that The Royal Danish Society of Sciences (*Det kongelige danske Videnskabernes Selskab*) should arrange an expedition to reach definitive conclusions about the signs at Runamo. This was agreed, a commission was appointed and in 1833 Finnur Magnússon travelled to Blekinge with Johan Georg Forchhammer (1794–1865), professor of geology at the University of Copenhagen; Christian Molbech (1783–1857), historian, literary critic and professor at the University of Copenhagen; and the painter C. F. Christensen (1805–83). On 14 July 1833 the three professors conducted a thorough investigation at Runamo. Christensen made a drawing of Runamo, while Forchhammer and Finnur Magnússon examined the geological features of the area. The Runamo cliff was cleaned and compared with another cliff close by, Maklamo, which the Danish historian P. F. Suhm had assumed to contain another runic inscription (Suhm 1787: 432; Finnur Magnússon 1841: 61). They concluded that the cracks at Maklamo were caused by nature, while Forchhammer found that some of the abrasions at Runamo were indeed man-made (Finnur Magnússon 1841: 35–36). Because of his lack of knowledge about runes, Forchhammer, as a geologist, was not able to conclude whether these artificial signs were runes or not (1841: 36–41), but he did differentiate between natural and man-made cracks. To Finnur Magnússon's mind (1841: 41) there was no doubt that the 'artificial' signs were runes, even though some of them were of a hitherto unknown type. Finally, copper engravings were produced based on Forchhammer's observations.

Back in Copenhagen the three scholars submitted a report on the 16th of November 1833 to The Royal Danish Society of Sciences, and in 1834 Finnur Magnússon published a preliminary report on his investigations in *Dansk Ugeskrift* (nos 119 and 120), but a full account of the investigation was not published until 1841, in *Runamo og Runerne*. In the meantime, in 1836, without having read the Danish report, the Swedish chemist Jacob Berzelius (1779–1848) examined the cliff, and — contrary to the Danish scholars — concluded that the abrasions were natural phenomena. But, as Forchhammer wrote (Finnur Magnússon 1841: 43): *Berzelius kjendte ikke Detaillen af vore Undersögelser, og vidste ikke hvilke Forsigtigheds-Regler vi havde truffet for at sikkre os mod de Feiltagelser, som forudfattede Meninger saa let foranledige ved slige Undersögelser* ('Berzelius did not know the details of our investigations or the precautions we took to guard ourselves against the errors that preconceived ideas may easily prompt in such investigations').

In Copenhagen, after his return from Blekinge, Finnur Magnússon studied the drawings of the inscription for ten long months without success, until

it suddenly occurred to him on the afternoon of 22 May 1834 — by sheer chance — to read the signs backwards. He was now able to read easily the word *hiiltekinn* (*hildekinn* or *hyldekinn*) and then one word after the other without any 'particular difficulty' (*synderlig Besværlighed*; 1841: 48). In a couple of hours he deciphered two alliterating stanzas, featuring elves, Æsir, Óðinn, Freyr and Freyja, along with proper names appearing elsewhere in narratives about Haraldr hilditönn (1841: 49). *Hildekinn*, he argued, appeared to be a variant of the cognomen Hilditönn. Finnur Magnússon immediately sent his discovery and transcription to P. E. Müller, who congratulated him on his achievement, which, according to a letter he sent to Finnur (and which is quoted in *Runamo og Runerne*), seemed both accurate and 'ingenious' (*ingenieus*; 1841: 49).

Finnur claimed to be able to decipher the following at the Runamo cliff (1841: 65–66):

HILTEKINN RIKI NAM ...
GARÐR INN HJO
ULI EIT GAF
VIGI OÞIN RUNAR
HRINGR FAI
FALL A MOLD
ALF(AR?) ASTAGOÐ
OLA (fjái?)

OÞIN OK FRI
(EJ)
OK ASAKUN
FARI (FARI)
FJANDUM VARUM
UNNI HARALDI
(N)
ÖRIN SIGR
(UNN)

The following literal Danish translation corresponds to the above reading:

Hildekind indtog (modtog) Riget (Rigerne, — Regjeringen)
Gard indhuggede (ɔ: Runerne)
Ole Eed gav (ɔ: aflagde Troskabseed) ...
Odin vie (eller hellige) Runerne!
(Gid) Ring faae
Fald paa Muld!
Alfer, Elskovsguder

Ole (hade, — skye, forlade)!
Odin og Frej
og Asers Slægt
ödelægge, ödelægge
vore Fjender!
Unde Harald
en stor Seier!

(Hildekind conquered (received) the kingdom (the kingdoms, — government) | Gard engraved (ɔ: the runes) Ole gave an oath (ɔ: swore allegiance) … | May Odin consecrate (or hallow) the runes! | (May) Ring | fall on the earth! | Elves, gods of love, | Ole (hate, — despise, leave)! | *Odin and Frej* | and the kin of Æsir | destroy, destroy | our enemies! | Grant Harald | a great victory!)

According to Finnur Magnússon (1841: 370), the inscription was magical or mythical, and the stanzas were composed in *galdralag*, a metre used to invoke the gods (1841: 375). The stanzas had been engraved on the cliff as part of a pagan ritual, a sacrifice and a service to the Nordic gods, performed by the army of Haraldr hilditönn, or perhaps only by Haraldr and his betrothed, shortly before the legendary battle at Brávellir, as a *magisk-religieus Bandsættelse af Landsforrædere, og Bönner til Guderne for den retmæssige Konges Sejer* ('magico-religious condemnation of traitors and prayers to the gods for the victory of the legitimate king') (1841: 62). Hoby parish, where the Runamo cliff is located, according to Finnur Magnússon, was on the route to Brávellir.

According to Finnur Magnússon, Nordic pagans believed that their prayers were more likely to be fulfilled if they were composed in verse and engraved in runes. As evidence for the magico-religious function of the inscription he pointed out that the inscription should

> læses bagfra eller fra Höire til Venstre, fra Nord til Syd og mod Solens sædvanlige Gang i Overensstemmelse med de Ceremonier som de nordiske, formeentlig tryllekyndige, Hedninger plejede at iagttage ved den Tilbedelse af Guderne, som skulde udvirke deres Fjenders Fald eller Ödelæggelse. (1841: 62)

> (be read backwards or from right to left, from North to South, contrary to the usual course of the sun, in accordance with the ceremonies which Nordic pagans, probably in possession of magical abilities, usually performed in worship of their gods, intended to cause the death and destruction of their enemies.)

The Runamo cliff also contained the figure of a snake, which Finnur Magnússon interpreted as a sacred representation of Óðinn. The inscription, Finnur Magnússon assumed, faced upwards towards heaven, where the gods were

believed to look down on what happened on earth (1841: 63). In extraordinary circumstances and in times of great danger, the kings would, according to Finnur Magnússon, perform religious rituals at a secret place of divine worship, in wild forests or mountains — as was the case with Runamo.

The signs at Runamo were believed to be the oldest runic inscription ever found, and Finnur Magnússon's and Forchhammer's results were widely accepted in Scandinavia, Germany, Russia and Holland (Worsaae 1844: 15). Finnur gave a copy of his book to the young archaeologist J. J. A. Worsaae (1821–85) who was, however, not convinced. In 1842, Worsaae went to Runamo and discovered additional marks at the cliffs with the same 'runic' appearance as the Runamo-runes. After carrying out a critical investigation of these marks he concluded that Forchhammer's geological investigations and his conclusion that some of the Runamo signs were artificial was wrong, and that the copper engravings of the signs under Forchhammer's surveillance were both inaccurate and erroneous (Worsaae 1844: 22). Forchhammer's authority as a geologist and his mistaken conclusions had, Worsaae noted (1844: 22), misled Finnur Magnússon. Nevertheless, Worsaae demonstrated once and for all that Finnur Magnússon's Runamo interpretations were pure fantasy; there was no longer any doubt (Worsaae 1844: 25) that *Finn Magnusens hele Læsning og Fortolkning af Indskriften, der var grundet på Afbildningen,* [...] *maatte være fuldkommen urigtig* ('the entire reading of Finn Magnusen and his interpretation of the inscription, based on the image, [...] had to be totally wrong').

Worsaae was neither judgemental nor polemical in his analysis of these rather scandalous results of the commission of The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters. Even though the expedition of the three university professors must have given rise to laughter, Worsaae (1844: 38) warned his readers against distrusting and showing contempt for the study of Nordic antiquity:

> Det kan neppe feile, at Mange efter Læsningen af disse Blade ville see Runamo-Sagen fra den komiske Side og fatte Mistillid eller vel endog Ringeagt for Oldtidsvidenskaben, der er istand til at læse naturlige Revner som gammel-nordiske Vers. Men denne Betragtningsmaade er aldeles forkastelig [...] i Læsningen af Runamo synes Phantasianskuelsen at have naaet sin störste Höide, og det er neppe nogen dristig Slutning, at Videnskaben af Frygt for lignende Feiltagelser nu nok vil vide at tage en mere kritisk Retning og saaledes arbeide sig fremad, om end med langsommere, saa dog med sikkrere Skridt.
>
> (Many people will undoubtedly after reading these sheets view the Runamo-case from a comical angle and distrust or even show contempt for the science of antiquity, able to read natural cracks as Old Norse verses. But this attitude is totally unacceptable [...] in the reading of Runamo, the fanciful approach seems to have

> reached its greatest height, and it is hardly a farfetched conclusion, that the discipline out of fear for similar mistakes will now take measures to assume a more critical stance and thus work itself onwards with steps, even if slower, at least more certain.)

Thus Worsaae used the occasion of his scientific success to plead for the application of a critical method in the study of Old Norse antiquities. According to Worsaae, scholars do better to draw limited rather than faulty conclusions. This has since proven to be the guiding principle of many philologists in their studies of Nordic religion.

The principle was followed by Niels Matthias Petersen who in 1849 published a work on Nordic religion with the succinct title of *Nordisk Mythologi*. Although Petersen's work on myths is perhaps not particularly noteworthy in the history of research on Old Norse mythology, he had a central and influential position in Old Norse studies at the time, being the first professor of Nordic languages at the University of Copenhagen (from 1844). Although N. M. Petersen frequently refers to Finnur Magnússon's *Eddalæren*, he passes silently over his Runamo adventure. In *Eddalæren*, regional myths are interpreted as variations of a universal system, and the myths are viewed as allegories of natural phenomena (cf. Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 above). Even though he regarded some of Finnur Magnússon's hypotheses as farfetched, Petersen was, nonetheless, an adherent of the prevailing theory of the time that myths rather investigate the origins of natural phenomena than preserve ancient history. His ideas about mythology were also inspired by the musings of the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) — about an ongoing triadic development, three stages, in which a given concept is annihilated by its opposite in the second stage, while the third stage is a return to the first in a truer form. According to Petersen, myths stem from an early stage of the development of religious thought, characterised by no abstraction and a unification of opposites.

Petersen held that myths are fragments of history insofar as they are concerned with events; they are, however, still ahistorical, since the beings inhabiting the myths never existed, but the myths are not natural science either, since they are expressions of the worship of nature as divine. Myths are metaphysical (in that they ponder present and future existence) but without making use of modern categories. They are history with no bonds in time or place, philosophy without its abstractions or syllogisms (Petersen 1849: 7); according to Petersen, myths reflect both nature and spirit.

N. M. Petersen regarded Finnur Magnússon's comparative and Indo-European approach to myth as reductionist and superficial (1849: 9–10):

> Uden tvivl vil De herved komme til at tænke på det forsøg man har gjort, at sammenligne vor mythologi med al verdens andre mythologier, og at vise overensstemmelsen imellem den og alle de andre. Dette storartede forsøg er især udført i Finn Magnusens Eddalære. Udførelsen af en så dristig tanke kan ikke finde sted uden en bundløs lærddom (gelahrtheit [*sic*!]), [...] ingen kan se på udførelsen uden beundring, uden beundring af den masse af kræfter — men heller ikke uden sorg, uden sorg over de spildte kræfter. Hvorledes kunde denne tanke falde noget menneske ind — uden en lærd (ved lærddom mener jeg den slags lamper, som oplyse en plet uden omkring sig, men lade hele stuen være mörk); hvorfor skulde alle mythologier være ens, det er jo netop smukt, at de er så forskellige. Det har derfor også vist sig, at undersøgelsen måtte hænge sig fast i det ydre, i blotte tilfældigheder; endog samme ordklang har ledet til at genfinde samme tanke (alt hvad der ligner Odins navn er fejet sammen i en dynge, fra det japanske hav af indtil Mexicos kyster); men imellem dem kan der ligge et åbent svælg.
>
> (You will thereby undoubtedly come to think of the attempt that has been made to compare our mythology with all other mythologies of the world and to show the correlation between it and all the others. This grand experiment is primarily carried out in Finn Magnusen's *Eddalære.* The realization of such a bold idea cannot take place without unlimited erudition (*gelährtheit*) [...] no one can view the implementation without admiration, without admiring the great effort [...] — nor, at the same time, without sadness either, without sadness over the wasted effort. How could this notion occur to anyone — except an erudite man (by erudition I mean that kind of beacon, which lights up a spot in its surroundings, but leaves the rest of the room in darkness)? Why should all mythologies be similar? What is beautiful is precisely that they are so different. It has also been shown that the investigation was forced to focus on the surface, on mere coincidences; even like-sounding words have induced the rediscovery of the same idea (everything that looks like Óðinn's name is swept into a single pile, beginning from the Sea of Japan to coasts of Mexico); but in between them there could be an open abyss.)

Instead of tracing world-wide similarities between different mythologies, Petersen wished to focus on the exceptionalism of Old Norse mythology itself. Even though he appears to have aimed at avoiding farfetched conclusions, Petersen made no attempt to practise source criticism. He used a variety of Old Norse sources, folklore material and at times non-Germanic sources. While he rarely refers to Greek or Latin materials, he leaves the Bible completely out of the discussion of Nordic myths. He never addresses the important issue of the value of Snorri's *Edda* in comparison to the eddic poems, nor is there any attempt to estimate the age of the latter, for example, *Völuspá* and *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, to which he refers several times. The vast majority of his sources are Nordic, and they are taken at face value. N. M. Petersen's nationalis-

tic exclusion of non-Germanic sources is reminiscent of his older contemporary Jacob Grimm (1785–1863), who in his key work on Nordic religion (*Deutsche Mythologie*, 1835) ignored texts from the Germanic area that exhibited explicit Christian ideology, because he was convinced that they represented a phase in which the originally 'pure' antiquity of the North had been 'polluted' by foreign ideas (see Zernack 2008).

Although the scholarship of the nineteenth century was dominated by Romantic philosophy and variously circumscribed by the nationalist paradigm, this did not of course force every philologist to focus narrowly on what he took to be non-Christian sources. One such scholar was the German historian Friedrich Rühs (1781–1820), an older contemporary of N. M. Petersen. In *Die Edda nebst einer Einleitung über nordische Poesie und Mythologie und mit einem Anhang über die historische Literatur der Isländer* ('The Edda with an Introduction on Nordic Poetry and Mythology and with an Appendix on the Historical Literature of the Icelanders', 1812), he criticized the Old Icelandic sources of the mythology for being late and first written in the Christian Middle Ages. According to Rühs, the myths were preserved for the purpose of entertainment and to educate young skalds. He considered that a Christian influence could be detected everywhere (Rühs 1812: 132–35). He argued against nationalistic approaches to the study of Norse mythology. Earlier, in his *Unterhaltungen für Freunde altdeutscher und altnordischer Geschichte und Literatur* ('Entertainments for Friends of Old German and Old Norse History and Literature', 1803: 77), Rühs had argued that the medieval literature of Iceland was dependent on Anglo-Saxon poetry. Rühs's sceptical view of the sources was strongly criticized by contemporary scholars, N. M. Petersen among them. Nevertheless, later in the century Rühs's critical approach was resurrected by another Norwegian scholar Sophus Bugge (on Rühs, see also Chapter 2.1 above).

Sophus Bugge (1833–1907)

In his *Nordisk Mythologi* (1849: 215) N. M. Petersen noted that the myth of Óðinn hanging on the tree in *Hávamál* (stanzas 138–42) had been neglected by scholars of Nordic religion. A few years later, in 1854, the Norwegian philologist P. A. Munch (1810–63) discussed Óðinn's hanging in the *excursus* of his work on Old Norse mythology, where he identified some Christian remnants in the stanzas (Munch 1854: 18). In 1881–89, the Norwegian philologist Sophus Bugge (1833–1907) followed up on P. A. Munch's and N. M. Petersen's discussion with a new interpretation of the *Hávamál* stanzas.

Bugge was in many ways a pioneer in Old Norse philology. From 1866 he was professor of comparative Indo-European linguistics and Old Norse at the University of Oslo. He was inspired by the Danish professor of Latin philology Johan Nicolai Madvig (1804–86), whose lectures he attended in Copenhagen (Holm-Olsen 1981: 97). While in Copenhagen Bugge studied the manuscripts containing eddic poetry, which led to his ambitious 1867 critical edition of the eddic poems, *Norræn fornkvæði: Islands samling af folkelige Oldtidsdigte om Nordens Guder og Heroer almindelig kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins fróða* ('Old Norse Ancient Poems: Iceland's Collection of Popular Ancient Poetry about the Gods and Heroes of the North, Commonly Called the Edda of Sæmundr the Wise'). In his editions and philological work Bugge was also influenced by P. A. Munch, who had published an edition of the eddic poems in 1847, entitled *Den ældre Edda: Samling af norrøne Oldkvad, indeholdende Nordens ældste Gude- og Heltesagn* ('The Elder Edda: A Collection of Ancient Nordic Poems containing Scandinavia's Oldest Legends of Gods and Heroes'), thus accepting the conclusions of Árni Magnússon in the *Vita Sæmundi multiscii* by no longer associating the collection with Sæmundr. In contrast with previous editions, Munch also assigned poems, which are only preserved in later paper manuscripts, to an appendix at the end, that is, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* and *Grógaldur*. The poems that are only preserved in post-medieval manuscripts *har et temmeligt mistænkeligt Udseende* ('look rather suspicious'), Munch argued, especially *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* and *Grógaldur* (1847: x). In the introduction, Munch provided information about the medieval manuscripts he had used but ignored later paper manuscripts.

This discrimination may seem of limited importance today, but at the time *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* was considered one of the most important sources of Old Norse mythology, as can be seen from N. M. Petersen's work on mythology and several of the writings of N. F. S. Grundtvig. The implicit disparagement of *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* thus had far-reaching consequences for the study of Old Norse mythology. Munch's edition had a direct influence on Bugge's edition of the eddic poems, but Bugge went much further by submitting the poems to a thorough investigation of their transmission history. Thus, in Bugge's edition, a large number of the young paper manuscripts were examined and collated for the first time, whereby he was able to conclude that they were all directly or indirectly derived from the Codex Regius of the eddic poems (GKS 2365 4to). Bugge's edition, moreover, presented *Völuspá* in its three existing medieval versions (Codex Regius, Hauksbók (AM 544 4to) and Snorri's *Edda*). For this reason *Norræn fornkvæði* remains an edition of scholarly importance today. Finally, inspired by Munch's line of thought, Bugge convincingly argued that

Hrafnagaldur Óðins and *Grógaldur* were post-medieval poems. Even though both Bugge and Munch had included these poems at the back of their editions, their work redefined the corpus of eddic sources for Old Norse mythology and removed *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* from studies on Old Norse religion — despite its prominent position in previous work on the subject. Henceforth the poem was excluded from editions and translations of eddic poetry. Bugge's edition thus in effect radically changed the textual corpus available for the study of Old Norse religion.

In a paper given in Copenhagen in 1876, Bugge demonstrated with methods from comparative historical linguistics that the eddic poems could not be dated to before the Viking Age, though he did not propose a specific new date for them. Here again he may have been influenced by P. A. Munch's work. In 1854 Munch had published a monograph on Old Norse mythology, *Nordmændenes ældste Gude- og Helte-Sagn* ('The Scandinavians' Oldest Legends of Gods and Heroes'). In the introduction he asserted that the Old Norse written sources dated from the Viking Age. From Bugge's mythological studies, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse* ('Studies on the Origin of the Nordic Legends of Gods and Heroes', 1881–89), it became apparent that he also considered the poems to have been composed in the Viking Age. In his work on Old Norse mythology, Munch had argued further that Old Norse religion was not identical with Old Germanic religion — even though the religions of different Germanic peoples had the same origin. The only place where the stories of Germanic religions had been preserved is in the Old Norse sources, because, as Munch argued (1854: 3), the Church never gained as much power in the North, and because the use of Latin never gained ground,

> det kunde lidet nytte den norske Historieskriver at fortælle paa Latin, som Sydens Geistlige, thi han vilde da kun have fundet faa Læsere. Historie-Skriveriet blev derfor Folkets, ikke strengt taget Geistlighedens Fag.
>
> (it was not much use for the Nordic historian to write stories in Latin like clerics from the South, because he would then have found few readers. The writing of history therefore became the field of the people rather than of the religious establishment strictly speaking.)

Munch's mythology mainly contained summaries of myths in accordance with Old Norse sources, and his analyses were not supported by many details. Still, in his *excursus* on Óðinn's hanging, he implicitly suggested a new direction for studies of Old Norse myths: the Anglo-Saxon connection — though he was not the first to do so. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Friedrich Rühs (1803: 77; 1812: 86, 121) had suggested that the poetry of Iceland must

be dependent on foreign, that is, Anglo-Saxon, poetry and that the eddic poems had to have been composed by Christians. According to Rühs, the Old Norse texts were highly problematic sources for pre-Christian religion, because they were written by Christians, and the myths were presented as entertainment for the education of young poets. He claimed that the influences of Christianity and Greco-Roman mythology could be traced everywhere in the poems (Rühs 1812: 132–36). At the time Rühs's sceptical attitude was rejected by Copenhagen scholars like P. E. Müller and N. M. Petersen, but it anticipated Bugge's radical view of Old Norse mythology. The idea of an Anglo-Saxon connection or origin inspired Bugge to embark on further studies in this field.

Bugge's title alone, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, suggests that his study was, at least to some extent, inspired by Munch's work with the similar title of *Nordmændenes ældste Gude- og Helte-Sagn*. But Bugge's title also emphasized a new focus: on the origins of the myths. He also leaned towards the sceptical attitude of the Danish philologist Edwin Jessen (1833–1921), a man renowned for his sharp pen, who had expressed doubt about the authenticity of stanzas attributed to Bragi inn gamli ('the Old') Boddason. In 1862 he defended a thesis, *Undersøgelser til nordisk Oldhistorie* ('Studies in Early Nordic History'), in which he criticized traditions about Ragnarr loðbrók and Gormr inn gamli in such a polemical tone that it prompted a remark from the faculty that it *maatte ønske, at Forfatteren havde valgt en anden Fremstillingsmaade* ('would have wished that the author had chosen another approach') (Jespersen 1922: 68; Brøndal 1937: 78).

Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse, which appeared in the years 1881–89, is Bugge's main work on Old Norse mythology. Like Árni Magnússon, Bugge was a radical in his critical method and approach to the Old Norse written sources. His monograph marked a break with Herderian studies of Old Norse mythology. He was present in Copenhagen in 1876 when the Danish archaeologist Henry Petersen defended his doctoral thesis, *Nordboernes Gudedyrkelse og Gudetro i Hedenold* ('Concerning the Scandinavians' Cults and Beliefs in Gods in the Heathen Age'). Here, Petersen claimed to have discovered certain similarities between Nordic and Greco-Roman mythology, and that the *Odin-Læren* ('Knowledge about Odin') in the different texts were informed by Christian thinking (Petersen 1876: 98, 137). At the defence Petersen's conclusions were met with harsh criticism, but Bugge was essentially persuaded (Holm-Olsen 1981: 118). Another scholar who had an influence on Bugge's ideas on Old Norse mythology was the Norwegian church historian Anton Christian Bang (1840–1913), who in 1879 argued that *Völuspá* was composed as a Nordic counterpart to the Greco-Roman Sibylline Oracles. Bugge sup-

ported this thesis in his *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, but Bang's proposition was opposed by the majority of scholars because they found it impossible to identify intermediaries between the Sibylline Oracles and *Völuspá* (Steinsland 2012; Rydberg 1881).[2]

According to Bugge, scholars have

> altfor ensidig fæstet Blikket paa de Elementer, som i sin Rod er nordiske eller germanske; man har enten altfor meget lukket Øiet til for Hensyn til de i det øvrige Europa raadende Forestillinger eller ogsaa altfor udelukkende forklaret Ligheder med andre europæiske Folkeslags mythiske Fortællinger af Urslægtskab. (1881–89, 1: 3)

> (focused all too one-sidedly on the elements, which are rooted in Nordic or Germanic tradition; they have either shut their eyes too firmly to the prevailing conceptions in the rest of Europe, or been far too willing to explain categorically the similarities with other European peoples' mythic tales by postulating shared ancient origins.)

Bugge's view of the mythology and his interpretations of it did not in any way depend upon the existence of an Indo-European proto-mythology. Many myths were, according to Bugge, of Nordic or Germanic origin. The purpose of his study was to define which elements of Old Norse mythology were indigenous and which foreign, since, as he stated, many of the tales and gods in the eddic poems and Snorri's *Edda* have no counterpart in Germanic sources and cannot stem from the Iron Age, *c*. 500–850 (Bugge 1881–89: 7–8). Bugge found traces of Anglo-Saxon influences in the vocabulary of the eddic poems, which led him to the conclusion that these poems originated in the travels and raids of the Vikings in the West. The basis of the myths was foreign, and the majority of myths were nothing but Nordic reshapings of medieval Judeo-Christian legends and Greco-Roman tales, which Nordic Vikings had encountered in the British Isles. According to Bugge, the Norsemen had heard these legends and tales told by monks or other people with clerical learning, who in turn had their tales from written records and books. Thus the Greco-Roman tales were already coloured by the Christian religion of their narrators. For instance, most of what is told about Freyja is, according to Bugge, modeled on tales about Venus.

[2] Such intermediaries have been identified since then: it has been argued that medieval Icelanders may have become acquainted with them through contacts with Anglo-Saxon, Irish or Spanish areas (Dronke 1996; Clunies Ross 1992; Steinsland 2013), but the Sibylline Oracles were also spread through the writings of Church Fathers.

In the first part of *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse* Bugge discussed the myth of Baldr's death and argued that in Snorri's *Edda* the myth was largely based on tales and poems about Christ. The different account of Baldr's death in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* was instead based on tales about the Trojan War. Höðr had not been blind in the original version of the myth; rather, his blindness originated in Christian tales about the blind Longinus, who wounded Jesus in his side with a spear. Saxo's Hotherus, however, is modelled on Paris, son of the Trojan king, who killed Achilles.

The second part of Bugge's *Studier* dealt with influences from Christian tradition on Óðinn's hanging on the world tree. According to Bugge, the wounded Óðinn on the tree is a parallel to Christ hanging on the cross, wounded by a spear.[3] According to Bugge, *Mythen om Odens Hængning i Galgen er* [...] *opstaaet under Indflydelse af Meddelelser om Kristi Korsfæstelse og Død, som hedenske Nordboer har modtaget af kristne Mænd paa de britiske Øer* ('the myth about Oðinn's hanging on the gallows [...] derives from the influence from stories about the crucifiction and death of Christ, which heathen Norsemen had heard of from Christians in the British Isles') (1881–89: 382). Bugge furthermore discovered a striking parallel to the stanzas in *Hávamál* about Óðinn's hanging in some verses from Shetland about Christ on the cross. These verses had been written down from memory in 1865.[4] According to Bugge, Old Norse mythology was a fabricated mythology from the early Christian period in Scandinavia and existed only to a very limited degree among the ordinary people, since it originated in books. But the transformations and reworkings of the foreign elements into a new harmonic wholeness in Snorri's *Edda* and the eddic poems, were, according to Bugge, *fuldstændig original* ('completely original') (1881–89: 8). This new wholeness was, indeed, the product of *den nordiske Aand* ('the Nordic spirit') — a notion reflecting the nineteenth-century concept of *Weltseele*, and thus a product of the nineteenth century.

As was to be expected, Bugge's attack on the indigenous nature of Old Norse myths was not widely accepted, being as it was at odds with the Romantic and

[3] As mentioned above, P. A. Munch (1854, 10) had previously identified Christian remnants in the story of Óðinn's hanging. N. M. Petersen (1849) conceded that his interpretation might seem reminiscent of Jesus on the cross, but he reassured his readers that the ideas behind Óðinn's hanging were both ancient and pagan and had existed prior to Christianity.

[4] 'Nine days he hang | pa de rütless tree; | For ill wis da folk, | in' güd wis he. | A blüdy mael | wis in his side – | Made wi' a lance – | 'at wid na hide. | Nine lang nichts, | i' da nippin rime, | Hang he dare | wi' his naeked limb. | Some, dey leuch; | Bit idders gret' (cited from Bugge 1881–89: 1, 309).

nationalist conceptions of myth that were widespread at the time. Bugge's methodology was also criticized for being inconsistent. His interpretations of Old Norse names as derived from Christian or Greco-Roman words were criticized for being so weak that he was forced to use folk etymology to support them (Holm-Olsen 1981: 120). Among Bugge's opponents was Finnur Jónsson, who started a long feud with him about skaldic poetry (Holm-Olsen 1981: 119–20).

Even though Bugge's radical view of Old Norse myth-making was criticized, it — together with the work of Friedrich Rühs — reintroduced the idea of Nordic religion as a product of Christian culture. If we follow Bugge's approach to Nordic myths, only a few fragments of Nordic religion are genuinely pagan, and these preserved authentic pre-Christian fragments would in no way be enough to reconstruct a pagan Germanic past. This view of Old Norse myths breaks completely with the Herderian concept of myth. Although it pointed forward to the theories about Snorri's *Edda* which Eugen Mogk advanced in the first half of the twentieh century, it was nevertheless largely rejected by the philological community. The nationalist paradigm persisted in the works of leading scholars, such as Finnur Jónsson, and Latin or Greco-Roman parallels are conspicuously absent in Ferdinand Detter (1864–1904) and Richard Heinzel's (1838–1905) commentary (*Anmerkungen*) in the second volume of their edition of eddic poems, *Sæmundar Edda mit einem Anhang* (1903). According to the introduction, however, their intention was to present the poems and explain them as educated Icelanders and Norwegians at the end of the thirteenth century or in the fourteenth century would have read them, understood them and appreciated them.[5] Paradoxically, Detter and Heinzel imagined that Icelanders or Norwegians in the High Middle Ages never had Christian or classical literary associations when reading eddic poetry. Their view of medieval Iceland and Norway is essentially the Grimmian concept of a Germanic culture, unpolluted by foreign influence.

Finnur Jónsson (1858–1934)

One of Bugge's most adamant critics was the philologist Finnur Jónsson, professor of Nordic Philology at the University of Copenhagen. In his autobiography, published posthumously in 1936 by his successor Jón Helgason,

[5] *Text und Anmerkungen suchen die alten Lieder so darzustellen und zu erklären, wie sie gebildete Isländer und Norweger am Ende des dreihzehnten oder im vierzehnten Jahrhundert gelesen, verstanden und gewürdigt haben. — Die ursprüngliche Gestalt derselben ist gewiss nicht immer zu erreichen* (Detter and Heinzel 1903: I, p. xiii).

Finnur Jónsson prides himself on 'common sense' in his scientific writings and 'complete lack of imagination' (*heilbrigð skynsemi*, *fullkominn skortur á hugmyndaflugi*) (Finnur Jónsson 1936: 170). He claims to have avoided, or virtually avoided, putting forward any conjectural opinions (hypotheses) (*Jeg hef eða þykist hafa verið alveg laus við að framsetja getgátuskoðanir* (*hýpotesur*) (1936: 169). To Finnur Jónsson's mind, Sophus Bugge's hypotheses were the quintessence of short-lived scholarly pipe-dreams (*loftskoðanir*):

> Sumir menn [eru] gjarnir á að fleygja fram þesskonar loftskoðunum [...] og gleypa þá sumir menn við þeim sem nýjum hugvitssömum kenníngum, kenníngum sem hjaðna undir eins og heilbrigð skynsemi andar á þær, þótt stundum geti þær verið nokkurn tíma í gildi. Jeg nefni t.d. goðafræðisskoðanir Bugges, sem óðu uppi eftir 1880 um 10–20 ára skeið. Nú lítur enginn maður við þeim, þóað einstöku menn þykist ennþá finna þar eitthvert sannleikskorn. (1936: 170)
>
> (Some people have a tendency to throw in those kinds of pipe-dreams [...] while others swallow these raw as if they were intelligent new theories, theories that dwindle away as soon as common sense breathes on them, although occasionally they may be considered valid for a limited period. I mention e.g. Bugge's opinions on mythology, which were quite dominant after 1880, and lasted about 10–20 years. Now they can't hold the interest of any man, notwithstanding a few lone individuals who still fancy that they can find there some grain of truth.)

In two articles (1890 and 1893) Finnur Jónsson discussed the problem, which Bugge had also discussed, that Viking Age mythology seems fully developed in the poems of such skalds as Bragi Boddason, while in *Norsk-Islandske Kultur- og Sprogforhold i 9. og 10. Årh.* ('Norwegian-Icelandic Cultural and Linguistic Circumstances in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', 1921) he addresses Bugge's hypothesis on Old Norse mythology directly. Traditionally, he argued, Bragi's poems are dated to the ninth century. If the eddic myths were modelled on Christian thought and introduced to the North via the British Isles — some time after the attack on Lindisfarne in 793 — this process must have run its course very quickly. Bugge solved the problem by transposing the date of Bragi's poems to the tenth century. Finnur Jónsson argues that Bugge's hypothesis would add up if it could be proven that the oldest skaldic poems dated from the tenth century or later, and were thus fabrications — which according to Finnur Jónsson is simply not the case (Holm-Olsen 1981: 120). To Finnur Jónsson's mind, Sophus Bugge's sceptical approach to the study of skaldic poetry was absurd. At one point he remarks condescendingly (1890: 147): *Det kan tilføjes, at Bugge overhovedet ikke tror på, at noget af de ældste norske skjaldekvad eller noget brudstykke af sådanne er ægte* ('One could add that Bugge in general does

not believe that a single one of the oldest Norwegian skaldic poems or any fragment of such a poem can be genuine'). Bugge's conception of the origin of Old Norse mythology also seemed to him far-fetched (1921: 82): *her er der ingen grænser for vilkårlighed og subjektive formodninger [...] ingen pålidelig eller sund videnskab; og Bugges udviklinger er netop hovedsagelig byggede over et så upålideligt grundlag* ('there are no limits here to arbitrary and subjective assumptions [...] no reliable or sound science; and the hypotheses of Bugge are in fact based primarily on such an unreliable foundation').

Finnur Jónsson published one monograph or survey of Old Norse mythology (1913) in Icelandic, because, as he noted in his autobiography, there existed in that language no proper work on mythology (Finnur Jónsson 1936: 166). Here he shows limited appreciation for previous scholarly work on the subject. After a short discussion of Finnur Magnússon, Sophus Bugge, Jacob Grimm and N. M. Petersen, his conclusion about previous scholarship runs as follows (1913: 2):

> Oft ljetu menn þá hugmyndaflug og andríki leiða sig frá rjettum grundvelli og sannri dómgreind, er aldrei má sleppa: og fór svo að lokum, að hver þóttist snjallastur, sem gat verið háfleygastur og kyngiþróttugastur í að samlaga hugmyndirnar og koma þeim saman í eina fagra heild og álitlega. En þessar fögru smíðar hafa reyndar rokið um koll.
>
> (Men often allowed inspiration and imagination to lead them astray from a sound basis and true judgement, of which one must never let go: and the final outcome was, that each man thought himself cleverest, when he was most grandiloquent and excessively imaginative in composing his ideas and gathering them into a sightly and pretty whole. But these pretty constructions have indeed collapsed.)

Thus, at the very outset of his work, Finnur Jónsson emphasizes his 'non-imaginative' approach and rejects in one sweeping move the hypotheses of previous ('imaginative') scholars. Consequently, he writes (1913: 1), he only intends to explain Old Norse mythology as it appears in old poems and writings or other sources, and to differentiate what is earlier from what is later. However, in practice, he puts forward hypotheses about the place of origin of specific mythological conceptions (e.g., Miðgarðr surrounded by the sea is, according to Finnur Jónsson, 'undoubtedly' a Norwegian idea, which seems to be modelled on the peninsula of Scandinavia (1913: 16–17). Sometimes he remarks that there appears to be no symbolic significance lurking behind elements in the myths, for example, in the animals in the ash tree Yggdrasill, which simply appear in myth as they do in nature (1913: 22). Sometimes his approach is folkloristic: Yggdrasill is a mythic conception of the folk belief that a tree planted

beside a farm house brings good luck. To Finnur Jónsson (1913: 23) Yggdrasill is merely a farm-house tree on a grand scale and thus it is simply not necessary to import the cross of Christ into the myth to make it comprehensible — as Bugge had argued.

True rationalist that he was, Finnur Jónsson also reduced the number of gods. According to him their number had steadily increased, not least because the individual characteristics of the gods had become detached from their persons, so that their characteristics had become independent figures: *Hermóðr [er] ekki annað en hernaðarmóður Óðins, Magni og Móði synir Þórs ekki annað en megin hans og móður, dóttir hans Þrúðr ekki annað en kraftur hans* ('Hermóðr is thus nothing but Óðinn's exhaustion in battle, Magni and Móði, the sons of Þórr, are nothing but Þórr's power and fatigue, and his daughter Þrúðr nothing but his strength') (1913: 13). Later he concludes about the poet Bragi: *sannleikurinn er sá, að hann er einn eiginleiki Óðins, skáldskapargáfan, gerður að sjálfstæðri veru* ('truth is, that he is one of Óðinn's characteristics, his poetic talent, which has become an independent being') (1913: 80). These gods are merely personifications of abstractions, their mythological roles are in other words limited, Finnur Jónsson remarks; some of them have been created only to fulfill a single task, like Viðarr, who is only brought into existence to avenge Óðinn.

Despite his strong aversion to 'imaginative' interpretations and his prosaic ideal of resisting the impulse to interpret myths, he was in reality not only inspired by folklore studies, but also open to nature-allegorical interpretations which were widespread in the nineteenth century, and were found in the works of Finnur Magnússon, Jacob Grimm and Karl Müllenhof (see Chapter 3.3. in this volume). Just as scholars within the field of comparative religion had done in the nineteenth century, Finnur Jónsson argued that mythic beings explicate natural phenomena: Óðinn was a personification of the sun, Mímir of water and Þórr of thunder (1913: 30–32, 104–05), while the goddess Earth was the wife of Óðinn with whom he conceived Þórr *líklega af því hvað nátengd frjósemi jarðar er við þrumur* ('probably because of the close ties between the fertility of the earth and thunder') (1913: 32). Finnur Jónsson remained a man of his own time, and perhaps one could say that his theory of myth was somewhat old-fashioned; when his monograph on mythology appeared, scholars elsewhere were beginning to focus on the ritual purposes of myths (see further below).

Finnur Jónsson uses a variety of sources: eddic poems, Snorri's *Edda*, Icelandic family sagas, kings' sagas, legendary sagas and legal documents, and to some extent he also discusses the value of the texts as sources. Descriptions of cultic activity in the family sagas are all taken at face value. As for the myth of Baldr's death, Finnur criticizes Bugge's thesis that the story was modelled on

Christian sources and concludes that it does not resemble the story of the death of Christ, although he concedes that Snorri may have been inspired by it to a limited extent. According to him, Christian sources or ideology have not influenced Old Norse mythology to any significant degree. He concludes his survey of Old Norse mythology by speculating about the nature of the relationship between men and gods (1913: 141):

> sambandið milli goða og manna var, sem áður er sagt, ekki það auðmýktar- og syndatilfinníngar-samband frá manna hálfu sem í kristinni trú; syndarhugmyndin var yfir höfuð ekki til. Hún gat því ekki gert menn að andlegum veslíngum eða dregið úr mönnum dáð og kjark, heldur ekki gert þá að sjálfpíslurum eða einrænum einsetumönnum. Sambandið var, eins og hjá fornþjóðum yfir höfuð, traustssamband, en þætti traust og hjálp ekki koma trausti í mót, þá var skamt til sambandsslita [...] [guðirnir] höfðu smámsaman orðið menskari og menskari í hugsunum, orðum og gjörðum. Og þó hafa þeir getað haft og haldið valdi sínu yfir hugum manna alt að lokum heiðninnar, þegar Ólafur Tryggvason hnekti henni með grimd og harðri hendi og Ólafur helgi fullnaði verk hans.
>
> (the relationship between gods and men was, as mentioned before, not a relationship based on feelings of humility and sin from the human side as in Christian religion; the concept of sin did not exist at all. It could therefore not turn men into spiritual weaklings or deprive them of their enterprise and courage, nor turn them into flagellants or introverted hermits. The relationship was, as with all ancient peoples in general, based on trust, and if trust and aid did not meet with trust, then the relationship was soon ended [...] [the gods] had little by little become more and more human in thoughts, words and deeds. And yet they must have been able to maintain and kept their power over the minds of men until the end of paganism, when Óláfr Tryggvason abolished it with cruelty and ruthlesness, and the holy Óláfr fulfilled his work.)

Finnur Jónsson's personal aversion to Christianity is obvious in his autobiography; Christianity is incompatible with his ideal of 'common sense' (*heilbrigð skynsemi*). Like many of his contemporaries, he believed that he could encounter strong independent (Nordic) manhood in Old Norse texts, unaffected by the soft spirit of Christianity. His firm conviction that Christian sources had only influenced Old Norse culture to a very limited extent was thus part of a larger ideological and aesthetic belief system.

Although Finnur Jónsson argued that Christian influence on the medieval sources was far less than might be expected, the view that espoused Christian influence was continued and became more pronounced with new generations of philologists in the twentieth century, scholars such as Eugen Mogk (1923), Walter Baetke (1950) and Anne Holtsmark (1964). According to

Mogk (1854–1939), Snorri had simply invented a great number of the myths he narrated. Mogk unhesitatingly argued that Snorri kept a *novellistiche Schule* in Reykholt. Walter Baetke (1884–1978) identified an influence in Snorri's work from Christian theology and teachings. Another influential scholar was Magnus Olsen (1878–1963), professor of Old Norse philology at the University of Oslo from 1908 to 1948, succeeding Sophus Bugge in that chair. Magnus Olsen was a student of Bugge's, and he assisted him in the work on *Norges indskrifter med de ældre runer* ('The Inscriptions of Norway with the older Runes') at a time when Bugge had become almost blind. In 1931–32, Olsen published an article on *Grímnismál*'s description of Valhöll with its many doors and warriors fighting day after day. He argued that the description of Valhöll was inspired by Roman amphitheatres, particularly the Colosseum with its gladiators. In this institution Norsemen would have been able to witness glorious fights day after day, and in some cases they would have seen the emperor decide who should die. This, Olsen argued, was furthermore a model for the Old Norse warrior god Óðinn, who decides who shall die in battle in many sagas and poems (Olsen 1931–32: 156–70). Olsen's theory presupposed an extremely long and unbroken period of oral transmission. He also investigated pagan cultic remnants in Norwegian place names with *Hedenske kultminder i norske stedsnavne* ('Heathen Cultic Memorials in Norwegian Place-Names', 1915), and *Ættegard og helligdom: norske stedsnavn sosialt og religionshistorisk belyst* (1926), translated into English as *Farms and Fanes of Ancient Norway: The Place-Names of a Country Discussed in their Bearings on Social and Religious History* (1928). His studies of cultic remnants in place names appeared around the time when the Cambridge classical philologist Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928) was publishing her influential studies on Greek ritual (*Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, 1912, and *Ancient Art and Ritual*, 1913) which had an impact on a number of studies of pagan rituals, also within the field of Old Norse studies. Anne Holtsmark, who succeeded Magnus Olsen as professor Old Norse philology in Oslo in 1949, was among those influenced by the Cambridge ritualists.

Anne Holtsmark (1896–1974)

Anne Holtsmark was a Norwegian philologist and the first female professor at the University of Oslo. She edited a number of Old Norse works and published translations into Norwegian of Old Norse texts. Her main interests were skaldic poetry and European influences on Old Norse literature and culture. In her doctoral dissertation, *En islandsk scholasticus fra det 12. århundre* ('An

Icelandic Grammarian from the Twelfth Century', 1936), she argued that *The First Grammatical Treatise* was influenced by contemporary Latin school books. In a couple of publications she cooperated with Jón Helgason (1899–1986), who from 1927–71 was leader of the Arnamagnæan Collection and professor of Icelandic language and literature at the University of Copenhagen. They co-edited *Háttalykill inn forni* (1941) and a normalized text edition of Snorri's *Edda* (*Edda, Gylfaginning og prosafortellingene*, 1950).

Anne Holtsmark began her research into Old Norse mythology with articles on two skaldic shield poems with mythological contents: 'Gevjons plog' (1944) and 'Myten om Idun og Tjatse i Tjodolvs Haustlöng' (1949). In the former article Holtsmark argued, based on a thorough philological investigation of a stanza from *Ragnarsdrápa* by Bragi Boddason the Old, preserved in Snorri's *Edda*, that it was possible to reconstruct in detail elements of the pictures on the shield that Bragi described in this poem. According to Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*, *Ragnarsdrápa* is about the legendary king Ragnarr loðbrók, and according to the text of *Ragnarsdrápa* itself, the poem is a description of the shield given to the poet by Ragnarr. In the *kenning djúpr̨ǫðull óðla* (corrected from *ǫðla*) ('deep-wheel of the lands') Holtsmark could identify a plough with wheels, a piece of farm equipment which was used neither in Norway nor in Iceland. This, she claimed, was 'a triumph of the Old Norse tradition' since her discovery made it probable that Bragi, in the supposedly ninth-century *Ragnarsdrápa*, described figures which originated in Denmark, the geographical realm of Ragnarr loðbrók, where ploughs with wheels were used. Accordingly, the *drápa* could be regarded as a contemporary source for an Old Norse myth, composed before the conversion to Christianity. Proceeding from her conclusions about *Ragnarsdrápa*, in 'Myten om Idun og Tjatse i Tjodolvs Haustlöng' (1949), she claimed that it was possible to reconstruct cultic drama on the basis of Þjóðólfr's poem *Haustlǫng* ('Autumn-Long'), another ekphrastic composition describing images on a shield. Holtsmark's study emulated studies of ancient descriptions of images in classical and Egyptian philology, and it was also inspired by Magnus Olsen's (1909) study of *guldgubber* (small gold foil images of humans) and *Skírnismál*, and finally by the hypothesis of the English scholar Bertha S. Phillpotts (1920) that most mythological eddic poems were originally performed as ritual dramas (cf. Chapters 5.1 and 10.3 in this volume).

Holtsmark notes that, as there is not much iconography preserved in the North, compared to the Greco-Roman area, her method of reconstructing the iconography of Bragi's shield in *Ragnarsdrápa* would come in handy. She draws on research in archaeology, onomastics and folkloristics as a means of comprehending the old poems — from the skald's own viewpoint, *skjaldens eget utgangs-*

punkt (1949: 98). Holtsmark considered the two shield poems, *Haustlǫng* and *Ragnarsdrápa*, to be the most appropriate of all for reconstructing pagan iconography, because of their composition in the ninth century. Phillpotts had argued (1920: 115, 124) that stanzas 14–20 of *Haustlǫng* described a cultic drama, but she had not investigated the first thirteen stanzas of the poem. Holtsmark accordingly set out to reconstruct the pagan scenes which Þjóðólfr might himself have witnessed and set out to describe in these stanzas. She was convinced that skaldic poetry had a function in the cultic worship of pagan gods. The skald was, according to Holtsmark, a *mytosofer* ('mythosopher') (1949: 100), and skalds probably knew pagan rites and religious games (*leikar*) and the meaning of these better than anybody else. Through a thorough analysis involving results from the related academic fields, mentioned above, Holtsmark ascertained that the first thirteen stanzas of *Haustlǫng* reflect a myth about the battle between the fertility god and the wind giant about the perpetually returning Iðunn who endows the gods with life — a myth about the changing seasons of the year. Holtsmark stressed the terrifying character that the pictures on the shield must have had — this had not originally been the amusing tale that it later became in Snorri's younger prose reproduction, and Þjóðólfr himself was, according to Holtsmark, filled with religious fear at the yearly festivals for *ár ok friðr* ('peace and prosperity') (1949: 130). In the third part of the article, Holtsmark argued that if the skald and the painter of the shield had witnessed such a cultic play, the lines uttered by the persons speaking in the stanzas might well derive directly from this play.

Holtsmark furthermore observed that some of the poem's descriptions of the gods did not appear to form adequate descriptions of deities, for example, *segǫndum sagna*, which she translated as *sigende sagaer* ('narrating sagas') (1949: 132). This would fit better if the skald was describing a procession where human beings, that is, cultic actors, represented or played the roles of the gods. After witnessing such a procession, according to Holtsmark, Þjóðólfr changed the cultic play into a myth; the stanzas thus give a glimpse into pagan cult, since they are interpreted as describing scenes from the worship of pagan gods. Thus, the Óðinn we encounter in *Haustlǫng* is not the god himself but a cultic actor who represents him in the play, probably a *goði* ('chieftain') who, as Holtsmark proposed, might have been referred to as *leikgoði* ('play-chieftain').[6] She further surmises on the basis of etymology, onomastics and folkore that the god

[6] Here Holtsmark draws on Saxo's account in Book 1 of the *Gesta Danorum* (*Saxo* 2015: 1. i. 7.1, pp. 52–53) of the Óðinn statue, and argues that this tale must also orginate in a cultic drama, although a different one from the play Þjóðólfr had witnessed (1949: 134–35).

Hœnir, who also plays a part in *Haustlǫng*, may have been represented by a figure with a bird's head in the cultic play, maybe by a bird doll; and in a kenning *hvalr þrymseilar* ('whale of the bowstring'), translated as *det larmende taus hval* ('the rambunctious silent whale') (1949: 144), she finds evidence of the use of rattles and bells in the play. Holtsmark finally concludes that the cultic drama can be dated to the ninth century and that it probably took place in Hvínir in Vest-Agder in Norway. To Holtsmark, *Haustlǫng* is an authentic contemporary source about pagan ritual which, furthermore, marks the origin of myths.

Today Holtsmark is mainly remembered as a meticulous source critic due to her most influential work on mythology, a study of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* which appeared in 1964: *Studier i Snorres mytologi* ('Studies in Snorri's Mythology'). While she considered *Haustlǫng* and *Ragnarsdrápa* genuine pagan poems and therefore presumably susceptible to a ritualist approach, Snorri's *Edda*, being a product of the Middle Ages, would have to be deconstructed critically in order to decipher its pagan contents. In her study of Iðunn and Þjazi, Holtsmark stated that Sophus Bugge, in his *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, was right when claiming that the myth of Baldr was inspired by Christian tales, but, she maintained, he was wrong when he dated the time of influence to the Viking Age. According to Holtsmark, the influence of Christianity on Old Norse myth is correctly dated to the Middle Ages. In *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, she provided evidence of this: Snorri's methods for describing the pagan gods and myths, and Snorri's sources. She concluded that Snorri had shaped the pagan gods and myths in accordance with Christian learning. Holtsmark noted that, as a skald, Snorri must have known pagan myths, but at the same time he was educated according to contemporary standards of learning, could read and write and must have known Latin: *Vi har rett til å regne ham for å være en eksponent for den høyeste kultur i sitt hjemland på den tiden* ('We are justified in regarding him as an exponent of the highest culture in his country in his day [i.e., *c*. 1200–40]') (1964: 16). Here Holtsmark's interest is text-critical and essentially philological. Her goal was to define which layers in Snorri's *Edda* belong to the Christian culture of Snorri's own time. Consequently, she made no attempt to interpret the significance of the contents of Snorri's work as pagan myths (*Det er ikke gjort forsøk på å tolke religionshistorisk de gamle myter han bygger på* (1964: 83)). The study was not directly inspired by Bugge, to whom she refers extremely rarely, but rather by Walter Baetke and Eugen Mogk. In this study Holtsmark's aim was to distinguish between the views of the writer (Snorri) and his sources.

At this time scholars were in disagreement as to whether the Prologue of the *Edda* had been written by Snorri or whether it was inserted into the work by

someone else (see the discussion in Volume 1 of this study, Chapters 2.1.1 and 2.2.1). In the first chapter of her book, Holtsmark compared the vocabulary of the Prologue with that of *Gylfaginning* and argued that the two texts were composed by the same writer. The Prologue presents traditional Christian theology in its description of the creation of the world and the confusion of tongues after the building of the tower of Babel that resulted in the pagan misconceptions of religion (cf. Volume 1, Chapter 2.1.2). In the Prologue, the overall understanding of the world and paganism, as well as the emergence of disbelief, is an example of *andlig spekð* ('spiritual wisdom'), which God granted to mankind. In *Gylfaginning*, however, everything is explained from a pagan perspective, that is, in accordance with *jarðlig spekð* ('earthly wisdom') (Holtsmark 1964: 11). Fundamental to Holtsmark's view of Snorri's *Edda* is the idea that Snorri had applied the theories of euhemerism, demonology and idolatry (all however termed 'euhemerism' by Holtsmark) in his descriptions of the gods and in his construction of the three Asians, Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði, and their explanations of pagan gods and myths. These theories had come to the North already with the early mission of the Church (1964: 9). Accordingly, Holtsmark identified false teachings and perverted doctrine in the words and tales of the Asians throughout the *Edda*. Methodologically, she employed sources, texts and translations from the twelfth century and earlier, along with iconography that Snorri is likely to have known. Holtsmark argued that the *Elucidarius*, believed to be authored by Honorius Augustodunensis (*c.* 1080–*c.* 1150), functioned as the model for *Gylfaginning*. The pagan disciple, Gylfi, sets out to inquire about the gods and the origins of everything, which is reminiscent of the beginning of the *Elucidarius* (1964: 17). But contrary to the situation in the *Elucidarius*, the information Gylfi receives is wrong and, according to Holtsmark, filled with irony (1964: 17–21). As an example of Snorri's irony, Holtsmark singled out Gylfi's question, which gods 'are people obliged to believe in?' (*er mǫnnum skylt at trúa á*), since a Christian reader would know that there was absolutely no obligation to believe in pagan gods. She further identified a number of expressions attributed to Gylfi, which, she argued, were new and fashionable in Snorri's own time, and so may have been a means of conveying his ironical attitude to pagan myth, including, for example, *þat veit mín trúa* ('by my faith'), *geysi-mikit* ('extremely big'), *geysi-mǫrg* ('extremely many') and *geysi-úiafnt* ('very unfairly') (1964: 21).

In Snorri's description of Óðinn, Holtsmark found that Christian terminology was applied everywhere; Óðinn is again and again described in terms of the Christian god. Medieval Christians, however, would easily recognize the description of Óðinn by Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði as the omnipotent god who

controls heaven and earth as self-evidently false doctrine. Snorri's contemporaries knew that the evil Óðinn was a devil and would recognize the words of the Asians as a devilish and false confession. The sayings and tales of the Asians are topsy-turvy theology, where Christian dogma is turned upside down. The description of Óðinn in Hliðskjálf, Holtsmark argued, is another example of this: it is inspired by the iconography of God sitting on his exalted throne in heaven (1964: 39–42). Similarly Snorri shaped Loki by using the devil as a model (1964: 67–68), while the description of Gefiun is modelled on Diana (1964: 69–71). Not everything, however, is explained by Holtsmark with reference to Christian doctrine. The conception of a golden age, as described by Snorri, is traced to Ovid's *Metamorphosis* I, *aetas aurea* (1964: 44). She suggested that Snorri had probably read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Latin or at least parts of it. The world-view of Ovid would have ranked equally highly as Old Norse paganism on a religious scale, since Ovid was a pagan. To Snorri, Ovid's pagan view of the world, Holtsmark remarked, was just another Babelic misunderstanding.

Holtsmark detected three layers in Snorri's *Edda*: the pre-Christian world-view and the pagan myths that the skalds knew; the Christian world-view and the teachings of the Bible, which Snorri had become acquainted with at school; and Snorri's own attempt to make the two world views fit together. Holtsmark concluded that a modern scholar of Old Norse mythology would have to eliminate the second and third layers before being able to identify anything like a genuine Old Norse pagan myth (1964: 15). She saw her own project as a contribution to this work, and it would thus, she noted, hopefully be of help to historians of religion.

Holtsmark's work was the first significant attempt to understand the complex textuality of Snorri's *Edda* and his reception of mythology. It inspired a number of later scholars, Dronke and Dronke in 'The Prologue of the Prose Edda: Explorations of a Latin Background' (1977), Faulkes in 'Pagan Sympathy: Attitudes to Heathendom in the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*' (1983), Weber in '*Siðaskipti*: Das religionsgeschichtliche Modell Snorri Sturlusons in Edda und Heimskringla' (1986) and Clunies Ross in *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's 'Ars Poetica' and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987) — and it retains an important position in current scholarship.

In 1967 Holtsmark produced a new edition of P. A. Munch's not particularly popular monograph on Old Norse mythology, *Norrøne gude- og Heltesagn*. Subsequently, in 1970, she published her own popular and pedagogical introduction to the field: *Norrøn mytologi: Tro og myter i vikingetiden* ('Old Norse Mythology: Belief and Myths in the Viking Age'). Here she followed the

path laid out in *Studier i Snorres mytologi* and stressed the problems faced by scholars of Old Norse religion, that the Old Norse textual sources were written by Christians and that the oldest written records mentioning the pagan gods are, indeed, Christian texts and sermons. The accounts of pagan cult and belief in the sagas can only be used with caution (*hvert tilfelle må granskes nøye* (1970: 10)) and by drawing on related academic fields, primarily archaeology and onomastics. The results achieved by Magnus Olsen in the area of Old Norse cult and rites are drawn on in several places (1970: 39, 91, 105), while she rejects Georges Dumézil's theory of the tripartite Indo-European social system, on the grounds that it did not easily correspond with Old Norse society (1970: 32). Even though *Norrøn mytologi* testifies to an interest in pagan myths and belief, the study is more consistent with the source criticism of *Studier i Snorres mytologi* than with her early ritualist approach to skaldic poems.

In recent years philological studies of Old Norse myths have tended towards a lesser preoccupation with strict source criticism. It has become more common to focus on the reception of paganism by medieval writers — the present two-volume study of the reception of the religions of the North may serve as an example along with Lassen's text-historical study, 'Óðinn on Christian Parchment' (*Odin på kristent pergament: En teksthistorisk studie*, 2011). However, Mogk's hypothesis has sometimes been reintroduced by scholars. In an article entitled 'The Masterbuilder Tale in Snorri's *Edda* and Two Sagas', published in 1976, Joseph Harris argued that Snorri's myth of the building of the fence around Ásgarðr was modelled on the tale of the berserks in *Eyrbyggja saga*, who were tricked into building a road before they were finally killed. In 'Snorri and the Mead of Poetry' (1981), Roberta Frank followed the same path, arguing that Snorri misunderstood stanzas and fabricated myths and deities on the basis of his own misunderstandings. The novelistic view of Snorri's *Edda* may be controversial, but it is related to the renewed interest in the reception of medieval writers. Today, all scholars acknowledge a Christian configuration in Snorri's *Edda*.

The discussion about the significance of the Christian influence for the study of Old Norse mythology is, in some respects, comparable to the debate about 'free prose' and 'book prose' in the study of *Íslendingasögur*. With Mogk's hypothesis, that the myths of Snorri's *Edda* are products of a literary school in the Middle Ages, Snorri's *Edda* became useless as a source giving direct access to the pagan world — but no less interesting as an artistic product of the early thirteenth century. Instead of hard-core source criticism, some recent studies have focused on the reception of pagan gods and myths by medieval writers (e.g., McKinnell 1994; Clunies Ross 1998; Lassen 2011). Other studies focus

on the codicological contexts of different texts about pagan gods (e.g., Simek 1991; Johansson 1998). The scholarly positioning and methods used in these studies are in accordance with the current trend in Old Norse philology to argue that different text witnesses are equally valuable as sources for medieval and early modern textual culture and to oppose eclectic or synthetic editions, based on stemmatics, with their inevitable reconstructions of texts to a hypothetical archetype, based on more than one manuscript — and the inescapable preconceptions of the editor. Many such studies are influenced, directly or indirectly, by 'new philology' with its focus on the codicological contexts of each manuscript and its emphasis on the historical, cultural and sociological factors surrounding and influencing the text.[7] The significance of manuscripts for the study of cultural history and reception studies has been emphasized by 'new philologists'. This is now a dominant trend, and many recent studies of Old Norse myths and gods are anchored in the material culture and manuscripts, which is indeed also the case in other branches of the field.

[7] The studies inspired by new philology have, however, recently been confronted by John McKinnell in a couple of articles on *Hávamál* where he commented (2005b: 83) that 'it is fashionable these days to consider Old Norse literary works strictly as they appear in the manuscripts, and there are usually excellent methodological reasons for adopting this approach, but in the case of *Hávamál* it is not very useful'. In this study, McKinnell sets out to reconstruct the process of the composition and compilation of *Hávamál*.

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10.3 – The Social Turn: The Pre-Christian Religions of the North in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Margaret Clunies Ross

Background: The First Half-Century

The study of the pre-Christian religions of the North in the first half of the twentieth century was dominated by the magisterial output of the Dutch scholar Jan de Vries (1890–1964) and especially by his *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* ('The History of Old Germanic Religion'), the first edition of which appeared in two volumes in 1935–37. This was followed by a revised second edition, published in 1956–57 but ready for publication by 1945 (de Vries 1956–57: v), with an unchanged reprint of the second edition appearing in 1970, and another reprint in 2000. As de Vries's title implies, his handbook was cast in the nineteenth-century mould of a history of Germanic religion reconstructed to a considerable extent from the evidence of Old Norse mythological texts, with some support from the evidence available from Continental European and Anglo-Saxon sources. Although numerous handbooks on this subject had appeared in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth (for a list, see Lindow 1985: 23–24), de Vries's is by far the most thorough and best informed. His knowledge of the Old Norse mythological sources, upon which he had written numerous independent articles, is especially good.[1]

[1] De Vries also wrote a two-volume handbook on Old Norse literature, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte* (1941–42: 2nd edn 1964–67).

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The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume II: From c. 1830 to the Present, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 577–592
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De Vries's *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* is Janus-faced: it looks back in its general organization and arrangement of its material to the model established by Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835) and it still assumes, as Grimm did, that it is possible to describe something called 'Germanic religion' as a unitary object of scholarly enquiry, when the evidence for that entity is provided mostly by sources from the Scandinavian Middle Ages and to some extent from the Viking Age. Nor was de Vries able to take much account of what would come to be a flourishing of archaeological discovery and regional studies both in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe in the second half of the twentieth century.

However, de Vries's study looks forward in its exemplary consideration of the evidentiary value of existing sources and in the depth of its interpretative scholarship, so that his handbook is still valuable as a reference work today. It is fitting that it formed the model in the minds of the group of scholars who planned the Pre-Christian Religions of the North project in the years 2008–12, though the divergences from the de Vries model in the resulting series of volumes that are in process of production from this project are as significant as the similarities.[2] In particular, one notes the stress upon diversity signalled in the title of the new series by the use of the plural noun 'religions', and the use of the phrase 'the North' to signal both the modern Scandinavian countries and the cultures of other communities living in the North of Europe, like the Sámi and Balto-Finnic peoples, rather than the vaguely defined 'Germanic' world of de Vries's and other handbook titles. The third significant difference involves use of the term 'Pre-Christian' rather than 'pagan' or 'heathen', terms that conventionally make a sharp and unfavourable distinction between Christianity and its predecessors (though no counterpart to either of these appeared in de Vries's title). In addition one should note that the distinction drawn within the *Histories and Structures* strand of the project (emphasized by its division into four separate volumes) between sources and their historical and geographical contexts on the one hand, and social contexts and conceptual frameworks on the other, is much more prominent than it was in de Vries's work, while the separate volume on the Christianization process and its implications underlines the importance that recognition of the Christian filter on pre-Christian Nordic culture has achieved during the last fifty years or so. And, with regard to

[2] There will be seven volumes in all in the Brepols series *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North*: four volumes of *Histories and Structures*, two volumes of *Research and Reception* and one volume of *Written Sources*.

the two *Research and Reception* volumes, it is a fact that these subjects had only a marginal place in earlier handbooks of Germanic or Scandinavian religions,[3] and thus represent the growth of a new field of research.

In the period up to the middle of the twentieth century, most theoretical paradigms scholars used to understand the pre-Christian religions of the North were those developed by writers of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth century, as discussed above in Part 3 of this volume and in Chapters 10.1 and 10.2. These formative paradigms included the theories of evolution, nature worship, animism, totemism and a comparative methodology in the study of mythology and religion. In this period university departments pursuing new branches of the Humanities, like anthropology and religious studies, came into being, though in different ways and at different speeds within the various countries that undertook the study of pre-Christian Scandinavia. These were principally the Scandinavian countries themselves, the German-speaking countries, the English-speaking lands (where there were also considerable regional differences, as, for example, between the United States and the United Kingdom) and other language communities to a lesser degree. Whereas departments of religion (or religious studies) frequently developed out of faculties or departments of theology in many universities, and were not often focused specifically on the pre-Christian religions of Europe in general and Scandinavia in particular, this was not the case in Scandinavia itself, where British anthropology and British and German religious studies of the late nineteenth century stimulated the already vigorous study of folklore and folklife (Nordberg 2013; see also Chapter 3.6 above). A number of studies of Scandinavian pre-Christian religious phenomena from the first part of the twentieth century are clearly influenced by Frazerian hypotheses of sacral kingship and fertility symbolism (e.g., Höfler 1952; Ström 1954; and — negatively — Baetke 1964).

With regard to the study of textual sources during the first half of the twentieth century, scholars from all the language communities mentioned above, plus some others, continued a largely philological approach to the subject of the pre-Christian religions and myths of the North. An idea of the extent of this endeavour can be gained from John Lindow's *Scandinavian Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography* (1988) and its summary assessment of the prevailing methodologies of practitioners up to *c.* 1982 (1988: xiii–xiv).

[3] De Vries devoted just over thirty pages to this subject, *Geschichte der Forschung*, in the first volume of his second edition (1956–57: I, 50–82).

The Social Turn: To c. *1970*

That the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North should take a social turn in the twentieth century was almost inevitable, given that theories of religion and myth of several kinds, all based in social practices, came together to exert their intellectual influence on those who thought and wrote about religion and myth. In this respect the Nordic field was no different to others, although in some quarters it was more resistant to new theories than other regionally based disciplines tended to be. At least in the first half of the twentieth century, many philologists tended not to take much notice of theories of any kind, or to be unaware that they were influenced by them, as Annette Lassen has shown in Chapter 10.2, using the example of the supposedly atheoretical Finnur Jónsson. Finnur was more forthright than most in his denial of the influence of theory on his understanding of the pre-Christian religions of the North, but many philologists shared his attitude, even if they did not express it in writing.

In Part 3 of this volume we considered the influence of the writings of the early British anthropologists and historians of religions, principally Tylor, Marett, Robertson Smith and Frazer, upon the developing practice of the comparative study of religions. These theorists, as Andreas Nordberg has shown (2013), exerted an early influence upon the development of religious studies in Scandinavia, especially in Sweden. Although each of these writers proposed different models for the understanding of the phenomenon of religion, they all contributed to establishing the importance of the social functions of religious practice. They saw religion as a body of traditional practices and ritual as the main means of human religious expression. (Their approach to myth is discussed below.) The French school of Durkheimian sociology reinforced the notion that religion can only be fully understood in terms of its social function but held that only its constitutive elements, such as cult, rite and symbol, can be scientifically investigated. The work of Durkheim and other Francophone scholars, such as Mauss, van Gennep and Hertz, on the structure of ritual does not seem to have had any widespread influence on the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North during the first half of the twentieth century, and the importance of their contribution has largely been realized in the period after 1970.[4]

[4] An exception is Weiser-Aall's (1927) study of initiation into Germanic male societies and some of the writings of Lotte Motz (e.g., Motz 1975). The work of Francophone scholars took a long time to register with Anglophone colleagues, as witnessed by the very long time that elapsed between publication of most of the original works and their English translations.

The approach to myth adopted by two of the late nineteenth-century British theorists, Tylor and Frazer, differed in detail but was consistent in one respect: they saw myth as a religious explanation of physical events. For Tylor, mythic knowledge of the physical world was an end in itself and derived from a primitive belief in the animate nature of natural phenomena, while for Frazer it was tied to magic and the means (albeit falsely based) for control of the world of nature. Both Frazer and Robertson Smith considered myth as secondary to ritual and as having arisen in order to explain ritual. Thus, as Smith wrote (2000 [1894]: 17–18), comparative religion should not focus on mythology. The rather equivocal approach to myth shown by these scholars was influential, especially Frazer's, but its precise impact on the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North is difficult to gauge.

For most of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, 'myth has been recharacterized as other than a literal explanation of [the physical] world. Either myth has been taken as other than an explanation [...] or myth has been read other than literally' (Segal 2009: 342). There have been many proposed answers to the question of the function of myth, and only some of them have gained acceptance or exerted influence in the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North. The functionalist view, as developed by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), sees myth as both explication of and accompaniment to ritual, and particularly as a means for its users to cope with aspects of their world that they have difficulty in controlling. Myth and ritual are thus closely linked (a nexus that has since been found not to apply consistently) in the writings of adherents of the so-called myth-ritual theory, which gained some influence among Scandinavianists, especially in connection with the idea that mythic texts may be faded witnesses to ancient rituals. The so-called myth-ritual theory has been applied to Old Norse sources by several scholars over a number of years (Olsen 1909; Phillpotts 1920; Holtsmark 1949; Dronke 1962; Haugen 1983; Gunnell 1995).

It cannot be said that twentieth-century theorists of myth whose approaches are psychological have had much of an impact on research in the field of Old Norse myth or the pre-Christian religions of the North. Both Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung considered myth as a window into the unconscious mind. For Freud myth both reveals and hides repressed psychological drives, while for Jung the unconscious is a storehouse of archetypes which can be expressed through myth. Very few interpretations of Old Norse myth and religion have been offered using these frameworks (one example is Glendinning 1980), though in more recent decades psychological approaches have been brought to bear on Old Norse sagas (e.g., McKinnell 2009; Torfi Tulinius 2015 [2004]).

Mircea Eliade (1907–86) was another twentieth-century theorist of religion and myth whose influence on research into the pre-Christian religions of the North has been rather small. Eliade followed Durkheim in claiming that the world could be divided into sacred and profane elements and argued that humans were predisposed to perceive the sacred even in the midst of the profane: myth then functions as a means of accessing the sacred. A small number of articles (e.g., Gruber 1977; Martin 1981; Polomé 1954; Schjødt 1981) propose interpretations of Nordic myths and texts in the light of Eliade's theories of cosmic symbolism and circular time, while Schjødt's study of initiation (2008: 33) draws on Eliade's distinction between the sacred and the profane. Eliade's study of shamanism (1964 [1951]) has been influential among the growing number of studies of this religious phenomenon (discussed further in Chapter 10.4), although it has also been criticized for generalizing too broadly about what shamanism is and identifying it as defined largely by the use of trance (cf. Hutton 2001: 141).

In the period before about 1970 only one twentieth-century theorist of myth besides those named already had any substantial influence on the study of Nordic pre-Christian religion and myth. This was the French scholar Georges Dumézil (1898–1986), professor of Indo-European civilization at the Collège de France from 1949. Leaving aside for the moment the intrinsic merits of Dumézil's approach, it can be argued that it suited the practitioners of studies in Nordic religion and myth for several reasons. Like most of them, at least until *c.* 1970, Dumézil adopted a reconstructive approach to myth, that is, he sought to interpret myths, not in the context in which they had been preserved but reconstructed in the light of what he argued was their original context. Like many Nordic scholars also, his work was fundamentally based in a comparative methodology, and, for the most part, like them his approach to sources was philological.

Dumézil's approach was also, however, new to the Nordicists in two respects: first, it was based on a Durkheimian conviction that myths reflect a given culture's social arrangements; and, second, it proposed a certain kind of structuralism which Dumézil argued was perceptible in all Indo-European mythologies. These common structures, he argued, reflected Indo-European and probably proto-Indo-European cultural traditions. On this basis he contended that the dominant structure of Indo-European societies was a tripartization into three classes or 'functions': the religious, the military and the farming or herding. All Indo-European mythologies reflected this tripartization; sovereign gods were related to priests and kings, warrior gods to the warrior class and fertility gods to

herders and farmers. The same division appears in Old Norse myth: Óðinn and Týr are gods of the first function, Þórr of the second and the Vanir of the third.

Dumézil wrote a lot about Old Norse myth, beginning with *Mythes et dieux des Germains* in 1939, revised as *Les dieux des Germains* (1959), and continuing to more specific and detailed studies, such as those in *Du mythe au roman: La Saga de Hadingus et autres essais* (1970). Dumézil offered scholars, both in Nordic fields and elsewhere, an attractive reconstructive Indo-European framework within which to understand the often apparently perplexing detail of the myths as the Viking Age and medieval sources presented them. It created order out of apparent chaos, and this advantage was obvious to the leading practitioners in the field. In several of his works published in the last decade or so of his life, Jan de Vries revised some of his views of the nature of Germanic religion and myth to accommodate Dumézil's ideas. Thus the second edition of *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (1956–57) reflects Dumézil's influence, as do several of de Vries's essays or chapters from the late 1950s and the early 1960s (de Vries 1960; 1961: 357–58) (De Vries died in 1964). Similarly, Gabriel Turville-Petre (1908–78) advocated Dumézil's hypotheses as a way of elucidating many dark passages in Old Norse myths in several of his publications of the 1950s and '60s, culminating in his *Myth and Religion of the North* (1964). While both de Vries and Turville-Petre were rather cautious Dumézilians, they nevertheless recognized the attractiveness of his theories in the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North.

In the period up to *c.* 1970 Dumézil was undoubtedly the dominant direct external theoretical influence upon scholars in the field of the pre-Christian religions of the North (for an assessment and discussion of works produced under his influence, see Lindow 1985: 42–49). Many scholars outside the immediate field of Nordic studies, particularly from the discipline of the history of religions more broadly, have adopted and refined a number of Dumézil's ideas, especially around dominant themes across the various Indo-European mythologies, pointing to recurring core themes like sacrifice, wars between groups of gods and giants, a hero's struggle with a monstrous serpent, cattle-raiding and so on (cf. Lincoln 1981; Oosten 1985; Watkins 1995). Yet other historians of religion have been sceptical of the Dumézilian hypothesis that there was such a thing as a persistent and specifically Indo-European ideology: 'the theory posits a cultural matrix without any areal or linguistic boundaries and this fails to address the means by which this evasive unity was maintained' (Jackson 2012: 52).

The Social Turn: Post 1970

From about 1970 a new generation of scholars, from all three fields that traditionally focused on the pre-Christian religions of the North, archaeology, philology and religious studies, came to maturity, and the intellectual complexion of research in this field changed appreciably, as did publications emanating from it. There was also a new upsurge of public interest in the field, which has continued and, if anything, increased in recent decades. This upsurge of interest involves both scholars and students in the universities and museums, and it may well be fuelled in part by the general popularity in the wider community of such topics as the Vikings, Norse mythology and pagan religions. The growing popularity of fantasy literature, and especially Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (published 1954–55) after about 1960, is undoubtedly also behind the increased general interest in Norse mythology and religion. The ubiquity of such themes in both popular and highbrow media, as several chapters in this volume explore, means that interest in the field has remained high. In addition, in Scandinavian countries, there is a continuing national involvement in the early cultures of their own societies and a high level of public interest in new archaeological discoveries. The latter extends to countries, such as the United Kingdom, where there was a substantial Viking Age presence.

It is probably true to say that most scholars of the pre-Christian religions of the North in the post-1970 era would subscribe to views about the nature of myth and religion that see both as fundamentally social practices: in the case of religion, as a means by which human societies encode conceptions of a general order of existence and provide a relation to the numinous; in the case of myth, as a vehicle for narratives (which vary from the embryonic to the epic) that express a society's fundamental concerns and problems, whether these relate to concepts of creative events of the past that brought the world into being and may lead to its destruction, or to significant forces in the here and now.

It is hard to improve upon John Lindow's (2000: 65) description of some additional characteristics of myth that have become very important to analyses of Old Norse myth published in the last fifty to seventy years:

> myth (or mythology) consists of a set of narratives (the myths themselves) that form a corpus, with a high degree of intertextuality. [...] It follows that the interpretation of myth is first and foremost an interpretation of text, because myth is narrative, and that interpretation of myth involves a chronological aspect, because myths are set in a time that is distant from the narrational present [...]. The chronology is chronology read socially, by which I mean that even if the setting of the myth is a distant world where the rules may be different, where magical events are

> commonplace, that world must relate in some way to the world in which the narration itself takes place. Finally, it follows, because of the intertextuality of myth, that much in a given text is immanent. It would be known to the narrator and audience even if it was not articulated in the text in front of the interpreter.

The premises assumed here have had important consequences for contemporary analyses of Old Norse myth: the first is that one should investigate the meaning of individual mythic narratives as part of a corpus, not simply individually; the second is that the interpreter should make use of the tools of textual analysis, which are primarily philological; the third requires the text to be read both in terms of its chronology and socially, that is, in the context of its preservation, but with regard to its presentation as a narrative of times past; while the fourth enjoins the analyst to be aware of the immanence of the text, which is likely to express just one of many possible versions of a particular myth.

This final quality of myth, especially in an environment recently transitioning from orality to literacy and from paganism to Christianity, as was the case in the Scandinavian Middle Ages, leads Lindow, later in the same article, to argue that the interpreter of myth should be aware of 'the unique circumstances surrounding each and every manifestation of myth: every performance, every text' (2000: 71). In this context he commends the approach of John McKinnell (1994), who has argued that the existing Old Norse sources reveal multiple 'faces' of individual creators, possibly representing several different points of view on particular myths within the larger mythological system. While this approach is salutary, and probably correct, if only we were able to know something of the usually anonymous authors or shapers of the mythic texts as we have them, such contexts of creation and performance are essentially unknowable, except through detailed and sensitive close readings such as McKinnell's.

This observation leads to another extremely important theoretical point that differentiates most work on Norse myth from after 1970 from what went before. The reconstructive approach, which characterized much writing from the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, has been largely avoided (but see Chapter 10.4), although it is to some extent implicit in any analysis that employs a comparative methodology. Reconstruction of a conceptual system, whether of Indo-European social paradigms or fertility cults or any other presumed underlying older forms of thought, must always be hypothetical to a large extent and cannot be taken as evidence that the people who composed the myths in the versions that have survived understood them in the ways proposed in reconstructive studies. The emphasis of most studies of Old Norse myth post-1970 has thus been on the myths in their contexts of preservation rather than on the

search for their contexts of origin, which is not to say that such quests are necessarily invalid when pursued with proper regard to their limitations.

The study of myths in their contexts of preservation requires the interpreter to deploy the skills of textual analysis[5] as sensitively as possible and to know as much as possible about all relevant versions of a given myth or myths from the Old Norse mythological corpus that have survived. Growingly also, the mythographer needs a knowledge of relevant archaeological data.[6] All this is a tall order and it is not surprising that most of the significant studies of Old Norse myth from the last fifty years or so have been book-length studies of certain myth-types (Steinsland 1991; McKinnell 2005) or of a particular myth-complex (Lindow 1997) or of a particular structural and conceptual feature, like initiation, to be found across the whole myth corpus (Schjødt 2008). Clunies Ross (1994) offers an analysis of how key themes from the corpus of Old Norse myth relate to other fundamental notions from the ideological world of the early Scandinavians.

The use of both textual and archaeological evidence in combination is growing in frequency. Books now appear, for example, in which the wealth of archaeological data about late Iron Age hall complexes, together with literary evidence from Old Norse poetry, is studied in the context of ideas about conceptions of death and the warriors' afterlife in Valhalla (Nordberg 2003) or the possibly sacral character of Scandinavian rulers (Sundqvist 2016). Other topics to have been investigated by a scholar drawing on the evidence of mythic texts, this time cosmological ones, alongside archaeological evidence is Andrén (2014), while Gardela (2016) has brought archaeological and textual evidence to bear on the subject of the use of magic staffs by practitioners of *seiðr*. These examples of interdisciplinary research are by no means exhaustive.

One of the undoubted advances in methodology in the field of the pre-Christian religions of the North in the period after 1970 has been an awareness of the ramifications of what can be called 'the Christian filter' in the study of the primary evidence. This advance has been gained largely through textual studies.[7] There is now general agreement that, from at least the Viking Age, the Scandinavian world was in religious flux, in differing proportions in its various regions, and that the impact of Christianity upon society was being felt

[5] The question of source studies and the requirements of textual analysis are discussed further in Chapter 10.4.

[6] The subject of interdisciplinarity and the extent to which it is possible in the twenty-first century is discussed further in Chapter 10.4.

[7] For details, see Chapter 10.2 above and Part 2 of Volume 1 of this study.

in various ways. More importantly, scholars are now aware that even those sources that may seem the direct expression of pre-Christian ideas can never be taken purely at face value, because they were not themselves the products of the pagan era but rather the work of Christian writers and copyists of the Christian Middle Ages looking back and recreating the past or at least producing new versions of old texts to suit the interests of a contemporary medieval audience. Part 2 of Volume 1 of this study expounds the various ways in which they did this and the dominant Christian theories about pagan religions that they drew on to shape their narratives.

In terms of methodology, appropriately to the social turn in contemporary research into the pre-Christian religions of the North, most researchers today, whether archaeologists, historians of religion or philologists, make use of ideas from the discipline of social and cultural anthropology to structure their work.[8] This is true not only of social institutions, like gift-exchange (cf. Miller 2008) and the bloodfeud (cf. Byock 1982; Lindow 1995 and 1997; Miller 1990) that twentieth-century social anthropology has illuminated, but also of the detection of otherwise hidden structures within texts, such as those of rites of passage, that may reveal much older concepts and social practices that are not otherwise apparent (Schjødt 2008). The structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), with its use of linguistic models for the theoretical framework of the study of cultural phenomena, has been of great importance to several scholars' thinking about how Old Norse mythology expresses the key ideas that occupied the minds of early Scandinavians. These can often be seen in Norse myths in terms of the binary oppositions that, Lévi-Straus argued, are fundamental to the way in which myth is able to present and mediate contradictions in society's world view.

Another area of the discipline that owes a great deal to anthropology is the understanding of the role of ritual in religious practice. In the Scandinavian context it is mortuary ritual that has excited the greatest interest, partly because the material evidence of graves and grave goods of various kinds in Scandinavia is abundant and often striking. Other important kinds of ritual, including sacrifice, rites of passage and rites of celebration, are much more difficult to identify in terms of archaeological evidence. The concentration on mortuary ritual in Nordic studies reflects a similar general emphasis in much twentieth-century anthropological research (Bell 1992: 33). This topic has included more recently

[8] For a thorough-going anthropological study of early Icelandic society, which includes myth, see Hastrup (1985).

studies of the role of mortuary rites in a symbolic and performative context, a subject investigated in greater detail in chapter 10.4.

Archaeological evidence for pre-Christian Scandinavian mortuary ritual goes back into the nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth, the period when the spectacular Norwegian ship burials of Gokstad (excavated 1880), Oseberg (excavated 1904–05) and Tune (excavated 1867) came to public attention. In those early days a link was immediately established with Old Norse texts and with national history, but not yet with myth and religion.[9] Since that time burials in ships have been excavated in Denmark, Sweden, England, the Isle of Man, the Orkney Islands and Brittany (Price 2008: 264–66). Ship burials are, however, only the most spectacular burial types to be found in the Scandinavian archaeological record, and there is now a large scholarly literature on the subject (see Price 2008: 257–73 for a summary).

Several anthropologists active in the second half of the twentieth century have written influentially about the study of ritual as a social process with a dramatic structure. One thinks of Victor Turner (1920–83), Clifford Geertz (1935–2006) and perhaps also Richard Schechner (1934–). All emphasized the performative aspects of ritual that make it like theatre and, in Geertz's case particularly, the ways in which ritual allows people to affirm social values. Although there is little direct evidence (except in the writings of Jens Peter Schjødt and some of the more recent work of Terry Gunnell) that the writings of these scholars on ritual have directly influenced today's archaeologists and mythologists working on the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia, it is probable that what has been called 'the performance turn' in anthropology may have laid the intellectual groundwork for the focus on the material record and its dramatic nature postulated for early Scandinavian mortuary practice (burial scenes treated as performance text) and some mythic texts, like the Poetic Edda, in the writings of several contemporary scholars of Nordic religion (see further chapter 10.4).

A different dimension to the social turn in studies of the pre-Christian religions of the North appears in the work of scholars belonging to the Retrospective Methods Network, which publishes its own newsletter. The

[9] 'Finally we come to the most difficult, but perhaps the most intriguing of all the questions connected with the Viking ship finds, namely whether the finds are directly connected with our national history. We must therefore try to combine the archaeological fact with the few existing purely historical sources, first and foremost the Ynglingatal poem' (Sjøvold 1957: 79–80). Few practitioners writing today would describe *Ynglingatal* as a purely historical source.

network defines itself as 'an open network [...] united by an interest in the problems, approaches, strategies and limitations related to considering some aspect of culture in one period through evidence from another, later period'.[10] Essentially, as the website claims, the method involves seeking 'the more immediate traditions behind limited sources', as, for example, where traditional lore from contemporary or near-contemporary folk-tales is drawn on to fill a gap in our knowledge of medieval sources. These reconstructive methods hark back to the ways in which Jacob Grimm and other nineteenth-century mythologists used folkloric material as support for particular interpretations of Old Norse myth and can be criticized for assuming similarities between chronologically and conceptually different types of witness. Networkers have been particularly active in researching areas of pre-Christian religious practice where there are few or no early records, such as in the circum-Baltic states, where oral transmission of traditional lore continued well into the twentieth century in some places.

[10] The network can be accessed at <http://www.helsinki.fi/en/beta/retrospective-methods-network> [accessed 4 January 2018].

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10.4 – Pre-Christian Religions of the North: The Reception Now

Margaret Clunies Ross[1]

'And the game begins anew'. (Gaiman 2017: 283)

Towards the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the pre-Christian religions of the North have never been more popular, both in the wider community and within the various academic communities in which the subject is pursued. It is the primary aim of the present chapter to assess where the subject stands in terms of its reception at the present time. The chapter will also have something to say about the on-going reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North outside the academic environment. The year 2017 alone saw the release of the movie *Thor: Ragnarok*, sequel to *Thor* (2011) and *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), based on the Marvel Comics superhero the Mighty Thor, as well as a new retelling of Old Norse myths, predominantly Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and the Poetic Edda, by the British author Neil Gaiman, simply titled *Norse Mythology*. In 2017 Jón Karl Helgason published his *Echoes of Valhalla*, an Icelandic scholar's take on the 'connection between

[1] It is always difficult to offer a fair and balanced overview of an enterprise that is in process of change and in which, furthermore, the writer is a participant. Thus implicit in this final chapter of the *Research and Reception* volumes is a disclaimer: it is as fair as the writer could make it without renouncing her particular approach to the subject.

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the eddas and sagas and their modern legacy' (2017: 11), while Lars Lönnroth presented Swedish readers interested in older literature but without a grounding in literary history with an overview of 'Germanic' literature, including myth, 'from Tacitus to Tolkien'.[2]

In the arena of academic conferences and publications, too, there has been a great deal of activity. One of the most significant meetings over recent years for those in the academic field of Old Norse mythology is the so-called Aarhus Old Norse Mythology Conference, named for the scholars at Aarhus University (principally Pernille Hermann and Jens Peter Schjødt) who initiated these conferences. It has taken place in different locations from 2005 to 2017.[3] A glance at the titles of these conferences reveals some of the major issues occupying scholars of Old Norse myth and religion during the last two decades. Several book-length publications have also appeared as a sequel to the meetings and individual scholars have also published research directly or indirectly related to their participation in the Aarhus conferences. Many other specialist meetings of archaeologists, historians of religion and textual scholars continue to take place mainly in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia, and in North America.

The Academic Scene in 2018

In some ways the academic environment in which the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North is pursued today remains conventional, at least in terms of its basic disciplinary organization. Research in the field is still carried out within the same three areas of the Humanities as it was during the twentieth century: philology (in its widest sense, including folklore studies), the history of religions (or religious studies, as it is often termed) and archaeology. Outside Scandinavia itself, where academic departments may sometimes concentrate

[2] 'Min egen lilla översikt är avsedd som introduktion för läsare utan förkunskaper i litteraturhistoria men med kärlek till gammal litteratur' (Lönnroth 2017: 7).

[3] The following are the locations of the Old Norse Mythology conferences, and the main themes discussed there: Aarhus 2005: 'Old Norse Myths'; Aarhus 2006: 'Old Norse Mythology'; Aarhus 2007: 'Old Norse Mythology'; Aarhus 2008: 'Myth and Memory'.Aberdeen 2009: 'Myth and Theory in the Old Norse World'; Reykjavík 2010: 'Gods and Goddesses on the Edge: Myth and Liminality'; Zurich 2011: 'The Performance of Old Norse Myth and Ritual'; Bonn 2012: 'Old Norse Mythology in the Digital Age'; Harvard 2013: 'Old Norse Mythology in Comparative Perspective'; Aarhus 2014: 'Myth and Knowledge'; Stockholm 2015: 'Myth, Materiality and Lived Religion'; Berkeley 2016: 'Paganism Past'; Helsinki 2017: 'Folklore and Old Norse Mythology'. I am grateful to Pernille Hermann for providing me with this list.

on Nordic religion and myth, specialists tend to be part of more broadly based units concerned with Germanic languages and literatures, the history of religions in a world-wide perspective and archaeology more generally. In some cases both within and outside Scandinavia research is carried out by particular groups of scholars in institutes or research centres, where like-minded experts from the various disciplines can collaborate on interdisciplinary research projects, and this is certainly a phenomenon that differentiates the academic scene at the present time from the way research was usually organized in the first half of the twentieth century. However, research in the subject has an international character, so that practitioners may work alone in a geographical sense but be intellectually within a network of colleagues connected through the internet and through meetings and conferences. An unprecedented number of publications in the field are also now available as free downloads from the internet through such platforms as Academia.edu, which certainly enables scholars and (in principle) members of the general public to access much of the most recently published research in the field.

There are notable differences in the ways that the three major disciplinary areas have fared in the last fifty to seventy years. These are reviewed in greater detail later in the chapter, but the current situation is summarized here. In some places the study of philology has declined in the recent past, both in terms of overall student numbers and in terms of academic interest and expertise, and it has become difficult in some countries, as a result of academic funding policies, to sustain subjects of small student enrolment such as Old Norse language and literature. However, where philology has become part of other disciplinary configurations, such as centres for Medieval Studies, for example, the study of Old Norse and other relevant languages can be protected and its practitioners' perspectives broadened.

By contrast with the philological discipline, where activity has been fairly broadly distributed across Scandinavia, the German-speaking and Anglophone worlds, with some input from scholars elsewhere, the last fifty to seventy years have seen an explosion of archaeological research at the hands of predominantly Scandinavian scholars, and this is also true (but to a lesser extent) of work in the field of the history of Nordic religions. New research activity in the excavation of archaeological sites within Scandinavia and the Scandinavian diaspora has certainly transformed our knowledge of many aspects of the material culture of Iron Age and Viking Age Scandinavia, a period for which written records are limited.

Interdisciplinarity

At the present time the ideal of interdisciplinarity is often held up as the chief method whereby practitioners within the field of the pre-Christian religions of the North can overcome the methodological and knowledge divides between the three major areas of philology, religious history and archaeology. Scholars in these fields have been exhorted to act in an interdisciplinary manner for some considerable time (cf. Buchholz 1968–69: 136–38), and it is certainly true that on all sides scholars primarily identified with one of the three disciplines are now much more aware of what is going on in the others. There is also a general willingness to adopt an interdisciplinary methodology. But can it be done? And should it be done?

For the purpose of this discussion, interdisciplinarity is defined as the practice of working in such a way as to contribute to or benefit from two or more separate academic disciplines. This concept differs slightly but significantly from the notion of multidisciplinarity, in which the practitioner combines or involves several separate disciplines.[4] Thus, in theory at least, a multidisciplinary approach involves a blending of several disciplines, while an interdisciplinary approach contributes to more than one discipline but does not necessarily adopt alien methodologies. The practice of interdisciplinarity is thus less fundamentally involved in the methodology of disciplines other than the practitioner's own, and this is the nub of the concern that some scholars of pre-Christian religions have with it, as will be discussed below. Aside from this concern, however, it is actually rather difficult to practise interdisciplinarity, not to speak of multidisciplinarity, for, as Catherine Bell has stated of the study of ritual, 'true multidisciplinary scholarship is beyond the abilities of most' (1992: 37), as it is very hard for individual scholars to maintain an equal capability across all relevant disciplinary areas, however much they try.

This generalization is even true of teams of researchers who do their best to adopt and promote an interdisciplinary approach to the pre-Christian religions of the North. One of the most impressive of these in recent years has been the team project *Vägar till Midgård* ('Roads to Midgard' [the Old Norse name for the world of humans]), undertaken by a group of archaeologists and historians of religion while they were all employed at the University of Lund (some of them have since moved elsewhere).[5] The project began in the late 1990s (for

[4] See the definitions of 'interdisciplinary' and 'multidisciplinary' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd online edn [accessed 8 January 2018].

[5] The Lund team had no resident philologist during the course of the project but made up

an account of its history and objectives, see Andrén, Jennbert and Raudvere 2006: 9–10) and culminated in a major conference at the University of Lund in 2004, with more than two hundred participants from at least fifteen countries. Papers from some of these participants were published in a magnificent volume entitled *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives* (Andrén, Jennbert and Raudvere 2006).[6] There is no doubt that the *Vägar till Midgård* project has had a major impact on the field and has produced a number of excellent publications in addition to the conference volume. It has also encouraged many in the field to be interdisciplinary in their work.

Another example of interdisciplinarity, closer to home, is the present project, *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North*, conceived as an integrated whole, with a balance in their respective contributions being struck between the major disciplines. The four volumes of the *Histories and Structures* strand has been the collaborative work of a trio of scholars from each of the constituent disciplines, the archaeologist Anders Andrén, the philologist and folklorist John Lindow and the historian of religion Jens Peter Schjødt, together with a number of other contributors. However, even here in the end one dimension of the *Sources* strand is unfortunately unrepresented, as it has not proved possible for the archaeologists who were to direct the gathering of representative examples of archaeological sources to obtain the necessary funding to produce a gazetteer of representative archaeological sites and objects to parallel those chosen for the *Written Sources* strand, which thus now stands on its own, edited by John McKinnell.

In her chapter above (10.1) on the concept of Germanic religion and myth, Julia Zernack describes the main theoretical problem to do with an interdisciplinary approach to Nordic myth and religions as 'the uncritical connection of findings from the individual disciplines', where reconstructions in each are based on different methodological assumptions, which may not be understood or heeded by practitioners of the other discipline(s). An example of this sort of difficulty occurs in an interesting chapter by the archaeologist Torun Zachrisson (2017), entitled 'Volund Was Here: A Myth Archaeologically Anchored in Viking Age Scania'. The chapter discusses a small image of a bird-man, identified

for that by inviting several text scholars to visit and participate in seminars from time to time. The project also had an international reference group.

[6] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the important subject of the funding of academic research on the pre-Christian religions of the North, but it should be noted here that *Vägar till Midgård* was very generously funded by the Bank of Sweden and also received grants, some of them substantial, from other bodies.

by her and previously by Michaela Helmbrecht (2012) as Völundr the legendary smith. It was discovered in 2011 during the excavation of the settlement of Uppåkra in Skåne, Sweden, and dated to the mid Viking Age (*c.* AD 950–1000). The left-hand wing/arm of the image differs from the right-hand one in having three to four oval or tear-shaped objects pendant from the lines that presumably represent feathers of the wing (Zachrisson 2017: 143, fig. 2). It is claimed without hesitation or iconographical analysis, though this is not entirely clear to the viewer, that these ovals represent blood: 'there are droplets of blood on the figure's left hand/wing' (Zachrisson 2017: 142). In turn, this diagnostic feature leads the author to claim that we can conclude that whoever made the bird-man image from Uppåkra must have known the same version of the myth of Völundr as is found in the late thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga*, where, among many other motifs, it is stated that Velent (the name for Völundr in this saga) bound a bladder containing the blood of King Niðungr's sons under his left arm and asked his brother Egill to shoot at it if Egill was forced to attack him, puncturing the bladder so that blood dripped down and made it look as though Velent had been wounded. The drops of blood (or whatever they are) 'thus illustrat[e] the saga almost as if it were a cartoon' (2017: 142) and lead to the conclusion that

> the legend [the version in *Þiðreks saga*] must have been known in Uppåkra in the late tenth century. People there who saw the object and listened to the myth were familiar with ruling families in a Danish realm and the skills of master-smiths and might have been able to imagine one of them constructing a flying device. (2017: 149)

Zachrisson uses this series of arguments to draw inferences about the nature of Uppåkra society in the middle of the tenth century and the status and role of smiths within it. She also compares the version of the Völundr myth in the eddic poem *Völundarkviða* with that of *Þiðreks saga* and relates the former to social life in different parts of Sweden in the Viking Age.

It is not only the over-simplification of the iconographical arguments used here to connect the bird-man image with the version of the Völundr myth in *Þiðreks saga* that might raise eyebrows among art historians and philologists, but the almost complete avoidance of discussion of the implications of the different age, provenance and character of the image vis-à-vis the age, provenance and character of the late thirteenth-century saga, which is normally considered to be based on a Norwegian translation of a Low German source. This avoidance is important because Zachrisson does not merely make a connection between the supposed motif of the blood in the image and that of the bladder of blood in the saga, which is just one among a number of motifs in the saga's treatment of the Völundr myth. Rather, she goes on to make a much broader connec-

tion between the kind of relationship between a ruler and a smith imagined in *Þiðreks saga* and the kind of society she postulates for mid-tenth-century Skåne. However, it is doubtful whether a source of such late date and probably non-Scandinavian provenance can be used to throw light on the social and cultural background of tenth-century Uppåkra.

Comparative Perspectives

Not so long ago the nineteenth-century inheritance of a comparative and reconstructive mythology modelled on the example of Indo-European comparative philology was out of fashion among researchers in the field of the pre-Christian religions of the North, although those who drew on the theories of Eliade and Dumézil necessarily subscribed to some version of comparativism (see further Chapters 3.2, 10.1 and 10.3). For the most part, though, the emphasis over the last half century or so has been more upon the analysis of Nordic religion within its own cultural sphere rather than in terms of a comparison between Nordic religious cultures and those in different parts of the world, whether near or far. However, the wheel now seems to be turning, as the problem of particularism is acknowledged by those who want to be able to understand Nordic religion in terms of beliefs and practices that can be argued to have parallels in other cultures, with the further aim of understanding common religious structures. This remains the fundamental objective of the discipline of the history of religions, in particular, but is not alien to the research field as a whole.

A recently published collection, *Old Norse Mythology—Comparative Perspectives* (Hermann, Mitchell and Schjødt 2017), the outcome of one of the Aarhus Old Norse Mythology conferences held at Harvard University in 2013, attests to the renewed interest in comparativism. However, it is clear from the book's contents that only a few of the contributors have used the term 'comparativism' in anything like its traditional sense to mean a comparison of similar religious phenomena across different cultures. About half of the contributions invoke different dimensions and characteristics of Nordic culture as a whole, and, though some degree of comparison with other cultures may sometimes be involved, most of the issues addressed are intra-Nordic. Hermann (2017), for example, urges attention to the orally derived nature of Old Norse mythic texts, to possible myth performance and various kinds of paratextual analysis, all of which have methodologies first developed *outside* Old Norse studies but depend, nevertheless, on their application *within* this discipline. Other chapters investigate Nordic material in the light of neighbouring cultural evidence, mainly Nordic/Baltic or West Slavic, in what Schjødt (2017: 4) calls 'genetic

comparativism', while only the final section of the book looks at what he terms 'typological comparativism', that is, the comparison of cultures and religions not historically related.

Schjødt's introductory chapter (2017: 3–27) proposes a way out of the impasse of unstructured comparativism, that has previously brought some discredit to the method. He first stresses a general need for comparativism in the study of Nordic pre-Christian religions because of the mismatch between the largely medieval sources and the much earlier beliefs and practices they describe; he argues that this 'necessitates the use of comparative material of various kinds' (2017: 3). He then differentiates the two types of comparativism, genetic and typological, defined above, and argues that those of the typological kind are the more revealing, provided the cultures being compared show a number of structural elements in common and represent societies of comparable kinds. In the chapter he draws comparisons between pre-Christian Nordic and traditional Hawaiian religion and society.

As Schjødt remarks, using a comparative method, even in the circumstances proposed above, can never allow analysts to be certain of whether their reconstructions are 'correct'. Given that methodological uncertainty, some may find it surprising that he goes on to state (2017: 23): 'I therefore believe that this way of using a comparative method—to create basic religious models—will in most instances overrule traditional source criticism, as no source-critical method can reject this sort of model.' It is hard to agree with this position, even if one is sympathetic to the use of comparative data in the way Schjødt advocates. It would seem that, in his view, users of the comparative method are immune from the linguistically based findings of philology if the latter do not happen to agree with the model proposed on the basis of what could be called structural comparativism.

Text-Based/Philological Studies

The remainder of this chapter examines the current state of each of the three major disciplines that contribute to studies of the pre-Christian religions of the North, and begins with philology as the oldest of them, and the discipline that is the ultimate basis of all the others (Turner 2014). In its broad sense (see Annette Lassen's Chapter 10.2 above for a discussion) philology comprises a set of skills and techniques including linguistic knowledge, in this case of Old Norse and cognate languages, plus Latin, familiarity with manuscripts and early printed books and the ability to read them, as well as textual criticism, that is, ascertaining the text, character, composition and origin of literary documents,

a discipline ultimately deriving from studies of the Bible. Among the practical skills of the philologist relevant to the study of Nordic pre-Christian religions is the ability to make and use new editions of key texts and to interpret their meaning, using the best available background knowledge. Lexicography and place-name studies are also part of the philologist's armoury. Most of the recent developments in the study of Old Norse sources are still based in the philological approach, including studies of sources as oral-derived texts, genre theory, memory studies, material philology and the detection of nonverbal features of texts that may imply an earlier history of oral performance. All these branches of source study acknowledge, more fully than previously, the special character of the textual record as it relates to the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North.

That special character is something that is now much more flexibly treated than it was fifty to seventy years ago. There is a general acknowledgement that, as far as is known, people had no scriptural texts during the period before the adoption of Christianity, in the sense of authoritative texts that articulated the accepted beliefs and religious practices of the religion's adherents. It is assumed rather that religious practices and rituals were passed on from one generation to the next through participant observation and learning on the job. Likewise, myths would have been narrated orally and probably usually existed in different versions, whose variability may well have been influenced by a number of factors, including geographical location, social status and individual levels of knowledge. The concept of a holistic Nordic 'religion' with its attendant mythology is no longer sustainable.

What has survived of the Old Norse textual record, predominantly written down in Christian Iceland in medieval times, is a series of narratives and other kinds of texts that represent the persons and actions of beings that we are on reasonably firm ground in calling 'gods' or at least 'supernatural beings'. These beings are depicted as existing in a mythical world that is both similar and dissimilar to the everyday world of humans. The texts we are able to draw on in a study of the pre-Christian religions of the North are partial, often allusive, and certainly not designed as pedagogical works in the modern sense, even if some of them mimic indigenous frameworks of knowledge, like the wisdom contest poems of the Poetic Edda. However, taken as a whole they constitute a reasonably large corpus, which is not as fragmentary as is sometimes made out. It is thus possible to subject this textual material as a corpus to the kind of comparative structural analysis advocated by historians of religion, provided that it is neither forced into the straightjacket of a particular theoretical model nor ignored if it does not fit a particular theory. The main disciplinary advantage

that philology can impart to a study of the pre-Christian religions of the North is to provide the best possible primary basis for that study and to expound both its richness and its limitations.

History of Religions/Religious Studies

This disciplinary area is currently very lively and productive, especially among researchers within Scandinavian universities. In other countries research into the history of the pre-Christian religions of the North is usually carried out within departments of Germanic philology or Scandinavian studies or even sometimes (in the English-speaking world) within departments of English language and literature, while in the United States there are some specialists who write about Nordic religious history (e.g., Bruce Lincoln, Kevin Wanner) in departments of comparative religion or divinity schools.

A great stimulus to the production of new writings on religious history in Scandinavia has obviously been the new knowledge generated through archaeological excavations in the North, particularly in the case of settlement patterns and ritual sites, to be discussed in the Archaeology section below. The comparative impulse, which has been central to the field from its beginnings, shows no sign of waning but has been combined, in many cases of recent publications, with other kinds of theory, often from anthropology or cultural studies. A number of the most important interdisciplinary works by historians of religion in recent decades (e.g., Nordberg 2003; Schjødt 2008; Sundqvist 2016) have already been mentioned in Chapter 10.3.

Notable also in this discipline area is the number of studies inflected to some extent at least by feminist interests and authored by women, including Gro Steinsland's *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideolgi* (1991) and her *Eros og Død i Norrøne Myter* (1997); Britt-Mari Näsström's *Freyja—the Great Goddess of the North* (1995); and Catharina Raudvere's studies of *trolldómr* rituals (2002: 73–171; 2003). These studies have a more general parallel outside the academy in the great public interest in the goddesses and other supernatural female figures of Norse mythology, like valkyries and norns, which is so obvious from the evidence of the literature, art and music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but rather poorly represented in the medieval sources. Both male and female historians of religion have written extensively in recent decades on the related subjects of magic, witchcraft and various forms of sorcery, called *seiðr* in Old Norse, a subject previously researched by several earlier writers (e.g., Strömbäck 1935; Meulengracht Sørensen 1983). Some of these studies have placed new emphasis on the importance of the connection

between Scandinavian peoples and their Sámi and Balto-Finnic neighbours (e.g., DuBois 1999), a revaluation that can also be traced in textual studies (e.g., Lindow 2003) and archaeology. Important studies of witchcraft and magic include Dillmann (2006), Tolley (2009), Mitchell (2011) and Meylan (2014).

Archaeology

There has been a huge increase during the last fifty years in the contribution that archaeology has made to our knowledge of the material culture of early Scandinavia, particularly in the subfields of settlement sites, ritual and mortuary practices. New sites and finds come to light so regularly that it is difficult for the non-specialist to keep up with this field, and, from within the field, because it is changing so rapidly, it is also difficult to present an up-to-date overview of the state of current knowledge of the archaeology of Iron Age and Viking Age Scandinavia. It is also clear that the extent of diversity of expression of religious culture, insofar as it can be deduced from material remains, must be acknowledged by all who work in the field much more explicitly than was previously the case.

Most archaeological studies relevant to the study of pre-Christian religion relate to the Iron Age and Viking Ages in Northern Europe (500 BC–AD 1000). For the period before *c.* AD 500 there are almost no written texts with which to make comparisons, except for those from outside Scandinavia (cf. Volume I of this study, Chapter 1.1), and in fact there are very few texts of any provenance for the whole of this period up to *c.* 1000, except for a few runic inscriptions. Thus one of the continuing and unavoidable problems of interdisciplinarity in this field is the chronological disparity between the archaeological and textual records. The latter are for the most part later than the former (they date mostly from the late twelfth century onward) and employ the Christian filter in all its complexity, as Volume I of this study has demonstrated. The majority of the texts are of Icelandic provenance and may show particular regional as well as chronological biases. Nevertheless, good accord exists between the Icelandic witnesses and that of the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, writing *c.* 1200, something that inspires confidence that the extant textual record is not completely idiosyncratic and unrepresentative of parts of Scandinavia other than Iceland, even allowing for Saxo's acknowledged debt to the Icelanders.

What follows is a non-archaeologist's assessment of the areas in which archaeology has advanced our knowledge of the pre-Christian religions of the North over the last fifty years or so.

Mythology and Cosmology

On the whole, very little definitely new information has been added in that time to our knowledge of the nature, physical appearance and properties or qualities of the pre-Christian Scandinavian deities and other supernatural inhabitants of the mythical world (as conceived by pre-Christian people). The main reasons for this are: there are relatively few images in Scandinavian art and material culture of the period that can be described as representational, especially representational of anthropomorphic figures (Zachrisson 2017: 139–40 provides a short survey; see also Fuglesang 2007); of those new representational figures that have come to light, like the Danish Lejre figurine discovered in 2009 (the so-called Lejre Odin — or is it Freyja or Frigg?), very few have clear diagnostic signs of their divine identity.[7] Take the example of the Rällinge 'Freyr' from Södermanland in Sweden: this ithyphallic figure is so stylized that one cannot be certain (Adam of Bremen and the *ingens priapus* of Adam's Fricco notwithstanding) that the image was intended to represent the god Freyr, in spite of many peoples' acceptance of this idea (a similarly sceptical note is sounded by Price 2006).

Evidence for the representation of Norse cosmology in the archaeological record is even more elusive. It has been argued, especially by Anders Andrén (2014), that representations of Norse cosmology, including the World Tree Yggdrasill and the nine worlds mentioned in *Völuspá* stanza 2/5, can be detected in such things as stone settings with central wooden posts, ring forts, and other spatially distinct arrangements, but, although these ideas are persuasive and one would like to believe them, such arguments stop short of proof.

Material Culture

We know a very great deal more now about the material culture of pre-Christian Nordic society thanks to the recent work of archaeologists, especially in connection with human habitation complexes including places of religious worship that show evidence of religious and other rituals, including mortuary practices. As recently as the 1960s, it was claimed (Olsen 1966) that separate ritual buildings for the conduct of religious ritual, especially sacrifice, in Scandinavia, did not exist during the pre-Christian period. Now we know for certain, thanks to a number of excavations, that they did exist, at least in some

[7] Images of the Lejre image (there designated Frigg) and the Rällinge 'Freyr' are to be found as Figures 51.2 and 43.3 respectively in *Histories and Structures*, Volume III.

parts of the general Scandinavian area. Undoubtedly, work that has established the presence of so-called 'central places' in Denmark, Southern Sweden and (to some extent) Norway has been and continues to be a major contribution of Scandinavian archaeology to the study of pre-Christian society and religion.

Not only have archaeologists demonstrated the existence of such complex and extensive areas of habitation, but also the fact that within the central places there are arguably buildings that can plausibly be identified as sacred ritual sites where various forms of sacrifice were carried out. Free-standing buildings and large halls have been excavated in which there are traces of ritual objects (including bones, silver or glass beakers and small gold foil figures, the so-called *guldgubber*). The range of evidence for ceremonial buildings and sanctuaries has recently been summarized by Sundqvist (2016: 95–160). Some of these sites were in use over a long period, in certain cases up to the end of the tenth century, and may then have been supplanted by new Christian towns with churches, as at Uppåkra-Lund. It has further been proposed, though this hypothesis requires further examination, that the new ritual buildings can be seen as indications of political and religious change which 'led to ruling families claiming divine descent as well as the development of new narrative traditions around the gods and goddesses, which became the historical background for the Icelandic literature' (Andrén 2011: 855).

Given the large number of central places discovered, mainly in more southerly parts of Scandinavia, relatively few of those found so far have any probable counterpart in the contemporary written record. Exceptions are Lejre (possibly the Heorot of *Beowulf*) and Uppsala, and in both cases some of the textual sources here are non-Scandinavian, Adam of Bremen for Uppsala and Thietmar of Merseberg for Lejre (see Volume 1, Chapter 1.1) and the Old English epic *Beowulf*, also for Lejre. We may also add the Norwegian trading post of Kaupang in Vestfold with the site named Skíringssalr in its hinterland. This place, called *Sciringes heale* in Old English, is mentioned both in the late ninth-century report to King Alfred the Great of the Norwegian trader Ohthere's journeys (Bateley 1980: 47, 55) and in the Old Norse poem *Ynglingatal* 22/10, usually also dated to the late ninth century.[8] *Ynglingatal* also mentions Uppsala three times (stanzas 13/2, 16/16 and 21/10) and Borre (stanza 24/10), site of a major burial field excavated in the nineteenth century, once (cf. Skre 2007).

[8] For the dating of *Ynglingatal* and the stanza concerned, see Marold et al. 2012: 5–6 and 48–49.

Mortuary Rituals

The richness of the archaeological record on the subject of pre-Christian mortuary practices and the evidence of graves for funerary ritual has already been mentioned in chapter 10.3. A number of recent publications have sought to combine a textual with an archaeological approach to the interpretation of the positioning of the deceased in the grave and the grave goods surrounding the corpse. This approach characterizes some of the publications of the archaeologist Neil Price (e.g., Price 2008, 2010), who draws on the skills of the illustrator Þorhallur Þráinsson to display sketches of the scene revealed when the grave is opened up. He presents an analysis of the tableau and the presumed ritual that created it, as if it were the set of a dramatic performance and the dead persons and their accoutrements were the characters and their props. This example of the performance turn in research is complemented by similar interests in the possible performative dimensions of some kinds of eddic poetry, notably that in the *ljóðaháttr* ('songs' metre') verse-form, by Terry Gunnell (1995; 2006).

Ritual Specialists: *vǫlur* and Shamans

An aspect of the current archaeological interest in mortuary ritual derives from the argued ability of researchers to be able to identify deceased individuals in terms of the social roles they played in life by means of the analysis of their grave goods. This applies particularly to those who have been identified as ritual specialists of various kinds, especially if they can be connected with the practice of the kind of magic called *seiðr* in Old Norse sources. The fact that a number of these corpses can be shown to be female has excited a good deal of interest both in the academic sphere and also among the general public.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, several studies of the phenomenon of *seiðr* and its practice in early Scandinavia have been carried out by historians of religion and textual scholars during the twentieth century. Their work was based largely on the evidence of medieval literary texts and legal documents and established a number of the essential parameters of the phenomenon: that in human society *seiðr* was said to be largely the province of female practitioners, called *völur* (singular *völva*), and could be used for divination, often to predict the weather but also the fates of humans and the world as a whole. *Völur* were reported to carry staffs, to wear particular kinds of clothes and to hold séances in which they required the assistance of other women to call up their spirit helpers in song. However, mythic texts also ascribe the practice of *seiðr* to males, mostly but not exclusively to certain of the gods, particularly Óðinn, but

also Loki, and in these cases the phenomenon is often said to be both antisocial and damaging to the practitioners' essential masculinity, although it could also be used to achieve ends not normally achievable by other means, as, for example, to seduce reluctant lovers, to separate individuals' spirits from their bodies or to influence the outcome of battle.

This gendered dossier on *seiðr* forms the background to the recent archaeological identification of some female graves, mainly from the ninth and tenth centuries in Scandinavia, as those of probable *völur*. The women buried there, usually in graves showing signs of high social status, typically wore exotic jewellery and clothing, but above all they were provided with special kinds of staffs, usually in the form of long iron rods, often with basket-like handles and knobs spaced along the shafts. These have been interpreted as the insignia of their office and the identifying feature of their specialist status. Gardela (2016) offers the fullest account to date of this group of graves.

A related topic, and one that has been the subject of debate for some time, both within and outside the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North, is the matter of shamanism and, in particular, the question of whether shamanism, as practised in the circumpolar regions, and by the Scandinavians' Sámi neighbours in the medieval period, was also part of Scandinavian pre-Christian religious practice. Not only is there debate about what constitutes the core of shamanism, whether altered states of consciousness and trance or transsexual identities and other psychosomatic manifestations (cf. Price 2011), but there is also debate about whether the god Óðinn can be said to be understood as a shaman in reports of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion or merely to manifest some shamanic characteristics, like the practice of *seiðr* and the ability to shapeshift. The same applies to the *völur* graves: is a woman buried in one of these really 'the Norse equivalent of a shaman' (Price 2008: 996, caption to fig. 61.3) or is it more likely that she has certain characteristics in common with shamans in other cultures?

Reception Outside the Academy

Some points of connection between academic research and the reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North among the general public are not hard to discover. There is certainly a great general interest in the material culture of the Iron and Viking Ages, and in all sorts of practical applications of Iron and Viking Age technology involved in the manufacture of replica weapons, armour and ships, as well as the equipment of modern-day shamans. Many such recreated objects are required for the activities of creative re-enactors, shamanic

faith healers and participants in New Age religions (on the last-named, see Chapter 9.2 above). There is also a common appropriation of signs and symbols, like the triquetra and so-called 'valknut', from supposed Nordic religious environments. Now that so much published material about the pre-Christian religions of the North is readily available on the internet, the interaction between academic and non-academic worlds is bound to increase and will sometimes lead to fruitful collaboration, as often in the work of metal detectorists with archaeologists.[9]

Reworkings of Old Norse myths continue unabated in a great variety of media, including music, fine art, literature of all kinds but particularly fantasy and science fiction, as well as popular media like comics and film: 'their innumerable contemporary reformulations suggest that the creative potential of this literature is far from exhausted' (Jón Karl Helgason 2017: 12). The authors or creators of these works still largely operate within a post-Romantic frame of reference, in which the Norse gods embody similar qualities and abilities to those of their predecessors in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the actions of the myths play out against the backdrop of the end of the world at Ragnarok. In fact, in the present age, the pessimism inherent in Norse mythology, the notion that the gods are not all-powerful but are subject to mortality, and that even the brave will one day be driven from Valhalla, strikes a chord with a great many people, whether they are viewers of *Thor* films or readers of the latest reworking of Norse mythology.[10]

The most popular reworkings of Norse cosmology and particularly eschatology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, notably those by Wagner and Tolkien, have exploited the implications of the Norse gods' imperfection and their inability to defeat the forces of chaos. This contention is borne out by one of the most recent reworkings, Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology* (2017). In his personalized introduction, he explains why he was drawn to retell the myths (2017: 12):

> It was the fact that the world and the story ends, and the way that it ends and is reborn, that made the gods and the frost giants and the rest of them tragic heroes, tragic villains. Ragnarok made the Norse world linger for me, seem strangely pre-

[9] The British Portable Antiquities Scheme <https://finds.org.uk> is an excellent example of an amazingly fruitful collaboration between archaeologists and members of the general public.

[10] One of these is the recent publication on 'the Viking mindset [...] it's a kind of death cult' by Tom Shippey (2018: 14).

> sent and current, while other, better-documented systems of belief felt as if they were part of the past, old things.

In terms of the continuing production of reworkings of Norse mythology, there is a direct line back from writers like Gaiman, who commands a large contemporary readership, to nineteenth-century retellers of tales, like the Keary sisters and their *Heroes of Asgard* (1857), as well as through J. R. R. Tolkien to the fantasy novelists and film makers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who use Norse mythological motifs in their narratives. Like his predecessors, Gaiman has done his research into Norse myths[11] and deftly combines material from his medieval sources into an apparently seamless narrative, as many researchers have also done before him. As a modern author, though, he clearly feels the need to fill in the unspoken details and possible reasons for mythic action, the psychological motivations and interpersonal relations between gods that elude the modern reader of the medieval sources because they are simply not expressed there, at least not overtly. As an example, he softens the story of how Óðinn brought the mead of poetry to the gods and men by attributing to him altruistic and paternal motives in stealing it: 'a fountain of mead spurted from his beak into the vats, one after another, like a father bird bringing food for his children' (2017: 150). We Old Norse scholars may smile knowingly at this inauthentic simile, which may well get a tick of approval from modern parents reading Gaiman's book to their children, but it is all part of the continuing process of reinterpretation.

[11] He signals a particular debt of gratitude to Rudolf Simek (1993). Sometimes Gaiman imparts quite unnecessary and gratuitous information to the reader in order doubtless to draw attention to his learning. For example, when narrating the myth of Óðinn's acquisition of the mead of poetry, he remarks (2017: 138) 'Rati means "drill"', perhaps just in case Odin's act of self-transformation and its purpose is lost on the modern reader.

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